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Guided Reading in the Elementary Classroom: Assessing Student Progress to Inform and Individualize Guided Reading Instruction

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Assessing Student Progress to Inform and Individualize Guided Reading Instruction

by

Jennifer Lyndsay Powell

December 1, 2010

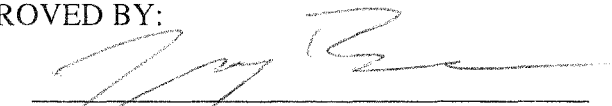
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Guided Reading in the Elementary Classroom:
Assessing Student Progress to Individualize Instruction

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Quality literacy instruction in the elementary classroom is the foundation for a child's academic career. Educators have frequently debated upon methodologies of literacy instruction and the assessment that drives the instruction. Based on personal philosophies, for example, teachers are often able to choose whether or not they will implement small group instruction in order to differentiate reading instruction. The lack of quality small group reading instruction may have a negative effect on young readers if not driven by appropriate assessment and collection of data.

Irene C. Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell are well known educators, who have done research on the effects of guided reading in great detail. They have shown that by implementing guided reading in the classroom students are able to develop as a reader while teachers scaffold instruction to promote success. During the guided reading process students are explicitly taught guided reading strategies that will aid them when reading more difficult texts. Students are given meaningful experiences for reading while teachers are given the opportunity to observe and assess more frequently (Fountas & Pinnell 2003, p. 1).

Problem Statement

Guided reading is a method of instruction that is used frequently within the elementary classroom. The teachers' goal is to create successful and independent readers. This becomes a very difficult task without assessing the students in order to monitor progress in reading. On the other hand, there are currently so many reading assessments available to teachers. Many of the reading assessments may aid teachers in driving guided reading instruction and placing students within guided reading groups.

How are these assessments chosen and furthermore, how are teachers using these assessments? Does administration within school districts purchase assessments that they deem mandatory? For example, a district may have reading assessments of multiple measures that they are mandated to give during the year. It is important that teachers assess the students, teach to their needs and reassess students throughout the school year. This study investigated the ways in which teachers' use mandated reading assessments to benefit students within guided reading groups.

Significance of Problem

Guided reading has become one of the most important areas of literacy instruction. Every teacher's goal is to successfully and effectively teach his or her own students to read at an independent level, which is the goal of basic literacy instruction. With a strong literacy background, students are able to think in more sophisticated ways, develop deeper background knowledge and expand their vocabulary (Temple, Ogle, Crawford, & Freppon, 2005, p. 5). In order to monitor progress of young readers, these components of reading need to be assessed several times throughout the year in order to effectively inform appropriate instruction in guided reading groups.

In all cases, guided reading should be implementing to improve student reading in terms of fluency and comprehension. In order to effectively impact each student within the guided reading group, their progress must be tracked and analyzed. Students must be regrouped frequently to ensure guided instruction aligns to each student's individual needs. In conclusion, guided reading is an important component of the guided reading classroom in order for every student to develop the skills to be an effective reader.

In schools, assessing students in reading by means of running records is essential for determining the level of each reader and ability to comprehend the text. Running records are an assessment tool used in addition to district-mandated assessments. This assessment tool is used to accurately analyze a child's reading behavior (Fountas & Pinnell 2003, p. 89). However, it should not be the only assessment tool used. Running records should also be used to determine appropriate grouping for the child and success of the guided reading program that has been put in place. Teachers should constantly assess students formally and informally within the guided reading group in order to meet each individual's needs.

Purpose of the Study

As a teacher, it is important to get an overview of each child's reading ability and progress. This allows teachers to personalize each student's education, focusing on their strengths and areas in need of improvement. Some students excel as readers and need enrichment in order to continue the learning process, while those who are struggling need appropriate intervention and correction. Assessing and tracking students' progress in the area of guided reading has become increasingly important, as many districts begin to implement the Response to Intervention (RTI). Such a process requires frequent assessment and data collection in order to adjust instruction in order for students to be successful. The majority of students whose progress is tracked by a RTI team demonstrate difficulties with the components of reading. Appropriate data is needed to track the students' progress and that is where reading assessments come into play. In other words, assessment is an essential component in tracking students' achievement in a guided reading group.

The purpose of this study is to determine what reading assessments teachers are using to inform their guided reading instruction. The ways that teachers use the data from the assessments in terms of guided reading instruction and grouping was also addressed. Finally, the frequency of the administration of assessments will also be a critical piece of this study.

Reading assessment can vary in form depending upon the area of reading that is being assessed. In the district where I teach, we have recently adopted a computer based assessment called the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI). This test requires students to read short individual selections followed by a single comprehension question in regards to what they have read. Each student's score is computed in terms of a lexile score, a score related to the text's complexity. As a teacher, I use the lexile scores as one way to determine an appropriate placement in guided reading. One disadvantage of using this program is that aside from the lexile score there is no other information given about the reader, particularly in the area of comprehension.

Research Questions

This research focused on the following questions: (a) At the elementary level, what types of reading assessments do teachers use to drive instruction and placement of students in guided reading groups? (b) In what ways do teachers use the data collected from the assessments to drive appropriate, individual instruction in the form of guided reading?

Definition of Terms

According to Tompkins (2003), Guided reading is when students work in small groups to read a text selected and introduced by the teacher at an independent level.

Reading assessment can be defined as a process in which a variety of reading skills are documented in measurable terms Afflerback, P., Kapinus, B., & Winograd, P. (1994).

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Effective Guided Reading Instruction in the Elementary Classroom

Research has shown that early reading success can set the stage for student's academic achievement throughout the educational years (McIntyre, E., Petroksko, J., & Powell P., et al., 2005). Many children experience difficulties when learning to read in the elementary grades; therefore, getting a late start on literacy may effect a child's ability to become a proficient reader. If a child is not exposed to differentiated instruction such as guided reading, their reading proficiency could be hampered for the durations of their school years. Researcher Iaquinta (2006) demonstrated that, the research-based strategy of guided reading is a positive practice when associated with today's literacy instruction. Teaching at a student's level is critical piece of instruction; otherwise it is likely that students will not be able to meet appropriate benchmarks at their grade level.

Guided reading is an instructional method that is used for all students, whether they are struggling or independent readers. This method is used to differentiate instruction based on the needs of individual students in order to improve reading skills at their level (Fountas & Pinnell 2001). Guided reading in the primary classroom may appear differently depending on the level of the students who are grouped together. The true goal of guided reading is for students to seek independence in reading.

Guided Reading

According to Tompkins (2003), teachers who use guided reading effectively in their classroom follow four elements in order to ensure purposeful instruction.

1. The main objective is to use leveled materials to support each child's reading.

2. During guided reading literacy procedures, concepts, skills and strategies should be taught by means of mini lessons followed by guided practice, which eventually will lead to independence.
3. Guided reading is an opportunity to introduce different genres to the students.
4. Students are taught the reading process during guided reading. In particular students are taught reading, rereading and responding to literature.

Guided reading instruction offers many benefits for young readers when students are grouped, instructed and assessed in an appropriate manner. Many times in small groups students feel confident enough to express their thoughts and allow their voices to be heard. Students who have the opportunity to work in guided reading groups are also more likely to participate in discussions that foster comprehension. In order for students to reach this level of comfort, while reading at an instructional level, it is important for the teacher to group students strategically. Students should be grouped mainly by strengths based on assessment to encourage positive attitudes towards reading. Groups of students should be assessed frequently by using a wide range of measures, and then regrouped to ensure that students are being taught at their instructional level (Fountas & Pinnell 2001).

Quality Reading Assessment

Quality reading assessment that may be useful for a guided reading situation can come in many different forms, but should have some specific characteristics. Assessment of reading is critical in order to provide the best instruction to foster student strengths and improve their weaknesses (Rasinski, 2003). Reading assessment in a guided reading situation is of great value to the staff and administration in the school district. Assessment

creates data for professionals in the field of education to track students' progress and for many other reasons as well. Assessing helps teachers create students who are "academically healthy" (Grandal, 2003, p. 39). It is important that each year a student receives an annual assessment in order to determine students' improvement and progress. It is crucial for teachers, administrators and other professionals involved in education to determine the quality of an assessment prior to administration of the examination. True quality assessments are meaningful and help schools in many critical ways (Grandal, 2003). Teachers can assess students informally; however, many districts prefer instruction, especially in the area of reading to be driven by data. Many times reading can be assessed by means of a rubric if the criterion is stated clearly. By assessing with the use of a quality rubric, the reading assessment process can be even more accurate (Afflerback et. Al, 1994).

Many times assessment can be used to analyze and aid students in improving upon areas of difficulty. According to Grandal (2003), "Assessment provides information on where students and schools need to improve and they may provide incentives for students and schools to make the necessary improvements, but tests alone cannot create improvement" (p.40). Assessments are simply a starting point for effective intervention and help to guide teacher's instruction. Assessment should be used in collaborations with other educators, students, parents and administration. It is important that information is shared and used, focusing on the students' progress (Grandal, 2003).

Fluency

Assessment in guided reading focuses on several dimensions of literacy, such as fluency. Fluency can be described as grouping or phrasing words in order to read with

automaticity and flow McKenna (2003). A student with adequate reading fluency is able to better understand what he or she has read. Rasinski (2003) stated that “Current, research-based forms of oral reading instruction, forms other than round robin reading, deserve a legitimate, primary place in reading curriculum at every grade level and for students of all levels of achievement” (p. 7) Children need to hear adults read and listen to themselves reading in order to gain fluency. This type of echo reading can greatly improve a child’s fluency. Fluency shows that the student has mastered word recognition skills.

According to (Hudson et. Al, 2005, p. 711-712) (Strickland, 2002) (McKenna, 2003, P. 77-79) there are many ways to address fluency in the classroom. Paired reading can be used to teach struggling readers fluency by pairing them with a stronger reader who is able to model the skill. Many teachers use choral reading in the classroom. Classrooms, wherein students and teachers have the same copy of the text and they read it aloud together in order to practice fluency. In the elementary grades, students often participate in echo reading. The teacher reads with fluency first, and then the students read the sentence back to the teacher using voice inflection and grouping of words. Reader’s Theater helps students to gain fluency because they are able to practice the play several times before acting in out to the class when following the script. Many times it is beneficial for children to listen to themselves read to listen for their fluency. Recording reading can help students set a goal for their own fluency. Repeated reading can be redundant, but effective. Students practice reading a passage unit they have demonstrated proficient fluency. Another form of oral recitation requires students to read a particular passage with 99% accuracy. Most elementary classroom has a listening center. This is

where a student can read with a book on tape as they practice their reading skills by reading along and listening to a fluent reader. This can be difficult for some students, so at the beginning they may listen to the fluent reader and follow along in the book. All of these strategies can be used in the classroom to promote and build fluency in young readers (Strickland, 2002).

Fluency has an impact of the teaching of students in guided reading groups. According to Strickland (2002), fluency needs to be taught in order for students to succeed in the other components of reading, especially comprehension. A student who has the ability to group words is more apt to understand what they have read in most cases. Students who read word-by-word without fluency lose comprehension, due the extra time spend retrieving and decoding words. If the student is unable to group words with expression, this can often lead to miscommunication between the information in the text and the reader (Hudson et. al, 2005).

Fluency Assessments

Fluency is one of the quickest and simplest components of reading for teachers to assess. Fluency assessments are equally as important as comprehension assessment when it comes to grouping students for guided reading based on their strengths. Many published reading programs have fluency components that aid teachers in assessing the students; however, fluency is easily assessed simply by informal observation of how the students are reading. The easiest ways to assess fluency may be using randomly selected, 100 -word texts. The teacher can then count the errors made on the passage and easily gain information based on that selection (Hudson et. al, 2005).

DIBELS is a common commercial assessment program that measures the fluency of an early reader. When a teacher uses DIBELS, students can be assessed for Initial Phoneme Fluency (ISF), Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF), Letter Naming Fluency (LNF), Non-sense Word Fluency (NWF), and Oral Reading Fluency (ORF), depending on their grade level. These assessments take approximately one-minute and provide teachers with immediate feedback about the students' level of fluency. DIBELS can be a very accurate indicator of how successful the child is as a reader (Schilling et. al, 2007). There are certain benchmarks that students should meet according to the DIBELS assessment. Each student's score can be categorized into a bracket, which will identify if the student is meeting the benchmark or if they are in need of intensive support and intervention (Moats et. al. 2003,).

Another effective assessment tool for assessing fluency is the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). Like DIBELS, the students read a passage aloud as the teacher uses specialized notation to record how the students reads the passage. The DRA also gives insight on the students' comprehension ability. In terms of fluency, the teacher must refer to a rubric to determine if the student read at a constant pace, grouped words or read with intonation. Use of the DRA is a great way for teachers to listen and watch how students read in order to determine the level of fluency (Burgin, 2009).

Comprehension within Guided Reading Groups

Comprehension is a dynamic process that can be defined as the ability to construct meaning from a text. Drawing upon background knowledge, making connections and inferences, visualization, and making meaning of vocabulary are just a few of the components of constructing meaning from a text (Temple et. al, 2005). The

reading skill of comprehension can be promoted in many ways within a guided reading group. Many times verbal discussion, use of graphic organizers or basic multiple-choice questions can promote comprehension skills. Because comprehension is more complex than fluency, it is also more difficult to assess and accurately track a student's growth in this area. It can be challenging to find a single assessment that will identify exactly which area of comprehension the student is having difficulty with (Hirsch, 2006).

According to Hirsh, "A student's actual ability to find the main idea of a passage is not a formal ability to follow procedures that will elicit the main idea, but rather the ability to understand what the text says" (p. 2).

Comprehension Assessments within Guided Reading Groups

Comprehension assessments are equally as important as fluency assessment when it comes to grouping students for guided reading based on their strengths. It is important that students' comprehension skills are assessed frequently and by means of multiple measures. As with most assessments, it is important that teachers administer benchmark assessments at the beginning of the year and mid year. Some comprehension assessments can be computerized, while others need to be administered, scored, and analyzed by the teacher.

Accelerated Reader is a computerized comprehension program that assesses students based on electronic trade books that the student chooses to read. Volland, Topping and Evans (1999) conducted a study, which involved a six month implementation of *Accelerated Reader* in two elementary classrooms with at-risk students. Student earned points based on the difficulty of the book and their success in reading. After earning points, the students could submit the points earned for tangible

rewards. Researchers found that students were successful after comparing results of *Accelerated Reader* on norm- referenced reading assessments.

Vollands et. al. (1999) found that *Accelerated Reader* was an assessment tool that was beneficial to students as well as teachers. The point system and choice of electronic trade books engaged students immediately and was found to increase the attitudes of students and their desire to read. *Accelerated Reader* also facilitated reading interventions based on the areas of comprehension that the students were struggling in. Teachers were able to track students' progress while the intervention was in place by means of the electronic program.

A simple form of assessment that measures the level of comprehension of individual students is running records. Running records are defined by Fountas & Pinnell (2003) as, "a tool for coding, scoring, and analyzing a child's precise reading behaviors." (p. 89). According to Herber (2004), running records are one of the most effective assessment tools to assess a child's reading ability and level of comprehension. This type of assessment is not new to the education system, but still is found to be very effective. It is most effective when grouping and tracking student progress in a guided reading situation. Running records show the students reading level, which may be independent, instructional or frustration (Herber 2004). The reading level is based upon the percentage of the passage the child was able to read well. It is expected that students who read at an independently are able to read 91% to 100% of the text correctly and students reading at the instructional level are reading with 90%-94% accuracy. If assessment results show that the student is reading at the frustration level they were able to read no more than 90% of the text correctly.

The results from running records tend to help teachers to form effective guided reading groups. In addition to assessing the level of reading ability, teachers are also able to gain insight into the way students process and comprehend the text. In most cases, running records will aid teachers in assessing the child's retelling of the story, ability to answer literal questions, infer and think critically. Fountas & Pinnell (2003), stated the accuracy rate and comprehension level helps teachers to provide the students with a trade book that is not too easy, nor too hard. Thus, teachers are able to group students appropriately for guided reading instruction.

Assessment Practices that Inform Guided Reading Instruction

One of the primary goals of elementary teachers, particularly in the primary classroom is to teach each individual to be a proficient reader. By developing a comprehensive assessment system and a process to monitor data, students are set up to be successful in the area of reading. McEwan (2002) stated, "Continual assessment is fundamental to the learning process" (p. 123).

As teachers evaluate their students constantly, the teachers become more receptive and responsive to the students individual needs. The development of long-term goals in the area of guided reading and assessing each student regularly helps to inform one's instruction. In today's society, it is no longer acceptable to allow one's "gut instinct" to inform instruction; rather, there is a need for evidence and data. There are many ways to collect assessment data to inform and drive instruction. A common practice among districts in New York State are giving quarterly common formative assessments in the area of reading, in addition to state mandated ELA assessments in grades 3 through 8. Each of these forms of assessment can provide teachers with useful

information on students' reading comprehension ability, which can in turn be used in guided reading.

In most districts, additional reading assessment tools are at the fingertips of teachers. Assessments such as DIBELS, Test of Word Reading Efficiency (TOWRE) and *Accelerated Reader* all assess students' ability in at least one area of reading. Careful selection of assessment by districts allows teachers to assess students reading ability in more than one area for more efficient results.

In districts where students are learning to read, as well as being instructed on how to read for information, it is imperative that teachers and administrators know every student's progress, not just those who struggle (McEwan, 2002). A comprehensive or overall view allows teachers to get an overall idea of the areas they can provide enrichment and remediation support to all students in order to keep them engaged as readers and work towards meeting goals, as well as expectations. This also allows teachers to form groups quickly and address the needs of each individual within that group. Informing reading instruction by means of data collection produced by assessment allows best practices for instruction.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

Introduction

This particular study focused on teacher usage of reading fluency and comprehension assessment data to inform guided reading instruction. During this study the researcher focused primarily on reading assessments such as, Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) and Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), running records and Common Formative Assessments. Emphasis was placed on investigating the different ways that teachers use the results to group students in guided reading and other less formal instructional methods.

The study took place in a rural school district in Niagara County, New York. This particular district educated students in pre-kindergarten to twelfth grade in three different buildings including an elementary, middle school and high school. The total student population in the school was approximately 1,500. Demographics of this district included a narrow sampling of diversity. The district population included, thirty Hispanic students, nine English language learners, eleven American Indians, and eight students of other ethnicity. Within the district, approximately 200 students were received special education services guided by an individual education plan. Many students came from low-income families and about 45% of the students receive free or reduced lunch.

This study took place in the elementary school, which housed approximately 700 students in grades pre-kindergarten to fourth grade. Class sizes ranged from 19 to 26 students at the time of research. There were about 50 teachers employed at the elementary school, and of those teachers two worked as academic support service teachers for math and reading. Each grade level in the school had four to five sections,

with the exceptions of pre-kindergarten, which had only two sections. In addition, each classroom teacher had an aid to assist in the classroom for about an hour daily.

The target population of this study was elementary school teachers, specifically in the second, third and fourth grades. At these grade levels guided reading instruction truly begins to take shape and focus on particular skills rather than the basics of reading. The primary goal of this study was to discover how elementary school educators use the assessments available in the areas of comprehension and fluency in order to inform their guided reading instruction. In particular, the goal of this study was to determine the ways in which teachers used the assessment results to inform their own guided reading instruction and group their students for most effective instruction. The objectives of this study will aid teachers in the following areas:

- Reading comprehension and fluency assessment types and purposes for guided reading
- Ways in which comprehension and fluency assessment results can aid in informing instruction in small guided reading groups
- Grouping students within guided reading groups based on data collected from reading comprehension and fluency assessments

Currently there are a vast number of reading assessments available to teachers. This study limited options of reading comprehension and fluency assessments, but was focused primarily on assessments that are commonly used in elementary education today.

Participants

The experience of the teachers that participated in the study also varied between three years to 29 years. The majority of the teachers taught in a general education

classroom with students who receive academic intervention services in reading. Four of the teachers surveyed taught special education and only one of those teachers taught in a self contained setting. Two teachers surveyed taught remedial reading at the elementary level. The teacher participants had many distinct differences in their teaching styles, age and experience.

During this study 20 different teachers participated in surveys. Of the teachers who responded to the survey, 19 of the teachers were female and one was male. All teachers from second, third and fourth grade were selected to participate in the study. The population surveyed was a convenience sampling of all of the second, third and fourth grade teachers at the elementary school.

Only those grade levels were chosen because they are currently using the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) to assess students reading comprehension and fluency. DIBELS also offers assessment instruments for second and third grade. Administration in the district deemed it mandatory to assess students using DIBELS for second grade and it is optional to assess third graders using DIBELS. All three grades must assess the students using the SRI at least three times per year.

Procedures of Study

In order to conduct this study, the researcher began by researching the reading comprehension assessments, fluency assessments and guided reading instruction that has been included in chapter two. Next, the researcher created a survey to obtain information about how other teachers may be using assessments that are mandatory in the school district. After the survey was composed it was sent to each of the participating teachers to complete with the utmost honesty. Each of the teachers were asked to print the

completed survey, place it in a sealed envelope and return it to the researchers school mailbox. This process was to ensure confidentiality to all teachers participating. Once all of the surveys have been reviewed, the researcher organized the data collection by grade level. Comparisons were also made between practices that took place in special education, remedial reading, and general education classrooms.

Instruments for Study

The initial instrument used for the study was a survey to determine how each teachers used assessments to personalize guided reading instruction and practices. The survey instrument was fairly simple and consisted of 15 questions based on three components: 1) reading assessment practices 2) implementing guided reading in terms of assessing and regrouping students 3) classroom practices. All of the questions were presented with a four point Likert-scale.

The first five questions pertained to reading assessments that have been used in the classroom. Teachers were directed to based their answers on a Likert-scale of strongly disagree to strongly agree. The purpose of the next group of questions was to determine how often teachers assess and regroups students within guided reading groups. Again teachers were asked to express their practices based on a Likert-scale, this time ranging from never to several times per year. The final sets of questions regarded the descriptions of guided reading practices that take place within each of the classrooms. Teachers described their classroom practiced by using a Likert-scale of strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Data Analysis Methods

In this particular study, the data were analyzed in two ways. First, the data was analyzed based on grade level or area. Secondly, the data was analyzed based on general education practices and special education practices. For each of these the data were categorized based on the survey question. By analyzing the data collected in this manor the researcher was able to find commonalities and discrepancies among grade levels, especially in the ways that assessment is used to drive guided reading instruction. The researcher also analyzed data in order to compare the ways that general education teachers used assessments to drive guided reading instruction to the ways that specialist use the assessment data.

Chapter 4 - Results

This chapter is a reflection on the survey regarding assessment, grouping of students based on reading assessment results, and practices of guided reading in the classroom. The survey was administered to 20 teachers in a rural public school in Western New York. The majority of the participants were general education teachers in grades two through four. The remaining six teachers were teachers of special education or reading specialists. The reading specialists that were included the perspective of Academic Intervention Services (AIS) for students who are currently reading below grade level or showing deficits in skill areas. Depending on the situation, the special education teachers or Reading Specialists either pushed into the classroom to assist with guided reading, or pulled students out of the classroom and work with them in a small group setting. Three of the special education teachers that were surveyed were employed as consultant teachers for every grade level two through four. The remaining special education teacher taught second graders in a self-contained setting.

At the district that was studied, many teachers have retired during the past few years and the district had hired many new teachers. Therefore, the elementary school consisted of primarily newer teachers who have taught for 10 years or less. About thirty percent of the teacher population at the elementary school was teachers who have had 21 years or more of teaching experience. The population of this study also consisted of primarily female teachers, as there was only one male who participated in the study. Second grade and fourth grade have the most students so there is an extra section for each of those grade levels. Results of this study may be limited due to the limited sampling of teachers in terms of gender and experience.

Table 1

Participants Characteristics

		n	%
Gender of Participants	Male	1	5
	Female	19	95
Teaching Experience in Years	0-5	6	30
	6-10	6	30
	11-20	2	10
	21+	6	30
Grade Level Currently Taught	2	5	25
	3	4	20
	4	5	25
	Special Education	4	20
	Remedial Reading	2	10

This research project was driven by the questions: How do teachers use reading assessments in order to inform and individualize guided reading instruction at the elementary level? In what ways do teachers use the data collected from the assessments to drive appropriate, individual instruction in the form of guided reading? The items on the survey were separated into three components in order gain an understanding of the usefulness of assessments that teachers administer, the frequency that the students were assessed and daily classroom practices depended on guided reading. A discussion of the synthesis of common findings will follow.

Uses of Classroom Reading Assessment

As part of the survey, five of the fifteen questions pertained to types of reading assessments used in the classroom. For each of the five questions the teachers were asked to rate the usefulness of Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI), Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), forms of running records, common formative

assessments and weekly reading assessments based on a four point Likert -scale. The scale included possible responses of strongly disagree to strongly agree. The survey results were analyzed based on the responses from all 20 of the participants.

Among all grade levels, including special education teachers and reading specialists, all teachers seemed to disagree with reading assessment and its usage for guided reading. The results show that many teachers find the assessments provided unusable for grouping students for guided reading and informing guided reading instruction. Teachers found assessments such as the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) and Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) to be fairly unusable assessments in terms of guided reading grouping and instruction. As shown in table 2, the standard deviation, which represents the range of the teachers' answers, is also quite narrow for these two survey items. Most of the teacher either strongly disagreed or somewhat disagreed when asked to reflect upon the effectiveness of the SRI and DIBELS in terms of guided reading instruction. On the other hand, elementary teachers found weekly comprehension and quarterly common formative assessments results to be fairly useful when grouping students for guided reading as well as for instruction. For each of these items about comprehension assessments the majority of teachers agreed that the assessment results are somewhat useful.

When questioned about the usefulness of running records for guided reading the majority of teachers agreed that the tool was in fact useful. The survey question read: When assessing my students' reading ability, I use the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) or other form of running records to appropriately group students for guided reading.

Table 2

Teachers' Degree of Agreement on Reading Assessment and Usage for Guided Reading. (Strongly Disagree = 1, Strongly Agree = 4)

Items on Reading Assessment and Usage for Guided Reading	<i>n</i>	Mean	σ
Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) informs guided reading instruction.	20	1.95	.887
Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) drives my guided reading practices.	20	1.65	.812
A form of running record is useful when appropriately grouping my students for guided reading.	20	3.3	.923
Common formative reading assessment results effectively drive guided reading instruction.	20	2.25	.966
Weekly comprehension assessment results affect the grouping of my students or instruction within guided reading.	20	2.8	1.15
Total	20	2.39	

Based on the standard deviation, teachers' responses were somewhat narrow, as 75% of the teachers somewhat agreed or strongly agreed that they found forms of running records to be useful in their guided reading practices. All participating teachers most heavily agreed upon the item regarding running records on the survey.

Uses of Classroom Reading Assessment by Special Education Teachers and Reading Specialists

After analyzing the results of surveys completed by Reading Specialists and Special Education results were found to be similar to general education results. These six specialists were asked if DIBELS was an effective form of assessment to groups students for guided reading and most of them disagreed. The specialists also strongly disagreed when asked if the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) or common formative Assessments were effective in assessing and grouping student for guided reading. However, 83% of special education teachers and reading specialists agreed that a form of running record is useful when determining an appropriate guided reading level for students. This was a similarity between general educations, reading specialist and special education teachers; however the special education teachers found it to be even more useful than general education teachers. Figure 1 illustrates that 75% of general education teachers agreed that a form of running record was effective when grouping students for guided reading.

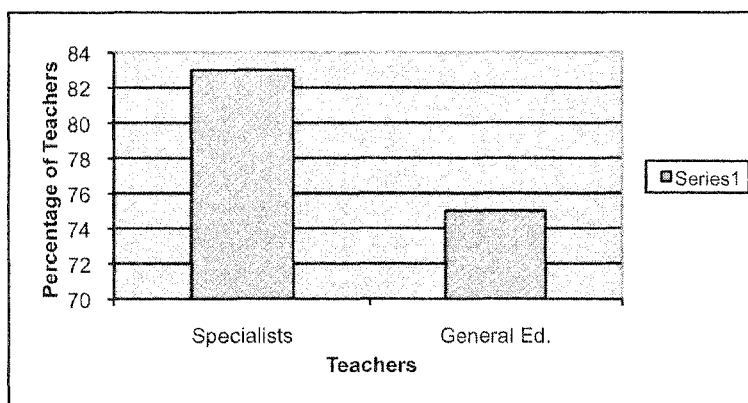


Figure 1. Teachers Agreed Upon the Usefulness of Running Records when Grouping Students for Guided Reading.

Frequency of Assessment and Regrouping for Guided Reading

Five out of the fifteen questions focused on the teachers' practices when assessing students and grouping them in guided reading groups. This was an important part of this study in order to determine how often teachers assess students and regroup them to meet their needs as a reader.

Table 3 represents the responses of all 20 teachers surveyed about the frequency that they assess and regroup students for guided reading. It is important to mention that teachers at all grade levels are assessing their students approximately a few times per year using the electronic SRI assessment. As stated previously, teachers are required by administration to have the students take the SRI three times per school year. Based on survey responses, some teachers give the SRI more frequently throughout the school year for their own personal records of students' growth in the area of reading. A standard deviation of 1.11 shows that there was in fact a wider range of responses on the likert-scale. This wider range may be explained by the fact that Special Education teachers and reading specialist are not required to administer the SRI to students, as many times it is administered within the mainstream classroom.

As noted in Table 3, there were also a positive correlation between the use of assessing students using a running record and how frequently students are regrouped. Teachers seem to assess students using a form of running record a few times per year. After they assess students it is very possible that they in turn regroup students for guided reading based on their reading level. Once again, it was noted that many teachers are using the running record as a form of assessment for guided reading even though it is not a required assessment by the district at the elementary level.

Table 3

Summary of Responses on Assessing and Regrouping Students for Guided Reading

Groups

Items on Assessing and Regrouping Students for Guided Reading	<i>n</i>	Mean	σ
Frequency of administration of the SRI assessment.	20	2.9	1.11
Frequency of use of running records.	20	3.3	.732
Frequency of administration of DIBELS.	20	2.35	.812
Frequency of administration of other forms of reading assessments.	20	3.15	.745
Frequency of regrouping students in guided reading groups.	20	2.95	.944
Total	20	2.93	

After analyzing the survey results based on all of the participants' answers, it was evident that the majority of teachers use the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI), running records, DIBELS, and other forms of reading assessments to assess students' reading a few times per year. This is partially because all teachers in grades two through four are expected to assess their students at least three times per year as required by the administration. Second grade teachers also assessed students using DIBELS three times per year. Other grade levels had the option to use DIBELS. Lastly, the uses of running records are completely optional among grade levels.

Second grade teachers used reading assessments more frequently than did any other grade. These teachers assess the students tri-annually using DIBELS based on district requirements. Commonalities can be noted among the third and fourth grade

teachers. All teachers at both of these grade levels were assessing students by using the SRI. The majority of the third and fourth grade teachers rarely assessed students' fluency using DIBELS. This could possibly occur because DIBELS targets for the primary grades and grade 3; therefore, they many not have used this form of assessment to assess students as frequently as other grades.

Figure 2 is used to compare the frequency of assessing and regrouping of students for guided reading among general education teachers, special education teachers and reading specialist. Based on the response to this portion of the survey from six teachers of special education and reading specialist, most specialists are not assessing their students using the SRI. These specialists are using DIBELS less than general education teachers; however, they tend to regroup students more than general education teachers. According to Figure 2, these six teachers rely more heavily upon other forms of reading assessment to assess and regroup students as they have other reading programs and probes that they implement during the school year.

Classroom Practices

The primary goal of this study was to determine the ways in which teachers use various reading assessments to inform guided reading instruction. Classroom practices were focused upon in five out of fifteen of the survey questions. The creation of these five survey questions was for the researcher to gain an insight of they ways guided reading is being used within the elementary classrooms.

Table 4

Assessing and Regrouping Students Based on Grade Level Responses

Items on Assessing and Regrouping	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Special Education Teachers & Reading Specialists
Students for Guided Reading				
Frequency of administration of the SRI assessment				
Never	-	-	-	68
Once or twice	-	-	-	-
A few times per year	60	25	80	32
Several times per year	40	75	20	-
Frequency of use of running records				
Never	-	25	-	-
Once or twice	20	20	25	16
A few times per year	60	25	60	68
Several times per year	20	50	20	16
Frequency of use of DIBELS				
Never	-	25	40	-
Once or twice	20	-	40	84
A few times per year	80	75	-	16
Several times per year	-	-	20	-
Frequency of regrouping students in guided reading groups.				
Never	20	25	-	-
Once or twice	-	0	20	16
A few times per year	40	25	20	68
Several times per year	40	50	60	16

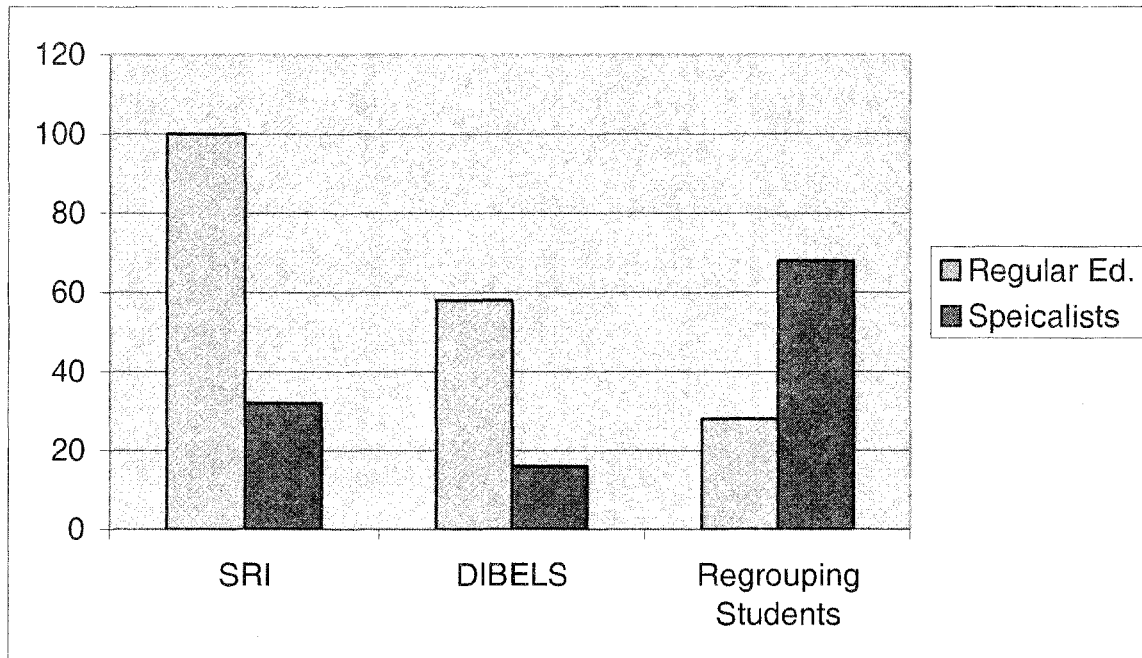


Figure 2. Frequency of Assessing and Regrouping Students Based on Responses from General Education Teachers, Special Education Teachers & Reading Specialists

Based on a Likert-scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree teachers were asked to respond to statements in regards to the way they practice guided reading in their own classrooms. Overall, it was noted that most teachers agreed that guided reading was extremely important to meeting individual needs of students. The majority of teachers also strongly agreed that it was important to instruct students in guided reading groups frequently. Administering the SRI assessment was found to be ineffective to many teachers when grouping students for guided reading. In turn, most teachers also found running records to be very effective when assessing students reading. This was a commonality throughout all grade levels and various parts of the survey that pertained to assessment and running records.

Classroom Practices According to Grade Level

When data regarding classroom practices was analyzed according to grade level, it was noticeable that there was little continuity between grade levels in regards to guided reading. However, teachers at each grade level had common classroom practices pertaining to guided reading. According to the data collected from the second grade teachers, there were few similarities among classroom practices.

Table 5

Summary of Responses on Teaching Practices within Guided Reading Settings

Items on Teacher Practices within Guided Reading	<i>n</i>	Mean	σ
Guided reading is an important component of teaching children to read.	20	3.7	.732
A high frequency of teaching guided reading is important.	20	3.6	.940
Reading assessment results are important when determining skills to teacher within guided reading.	20	3.45	.825
SRI is useful when determine grouping of students for guided reading.	20	1.9	.852
Running records are an effective assessment tool to determine student grouping for guided reading.	20	3.7	.470
Total	20	3.27	

The second grade teachers all teachers agreed that guided reading was important in meeting individual needs, frequent guided reading instruction was important, reading

assessment results did help to determine skills that need to be taught and running records were effective when grouping and instructing students.

Third grade teachers showed similar consensus between beliefs and practices. Most teachers agreed that guided reading was important in order to meet students' needs, frequent instruction within guided reading was critical, reading assessment results did aid in determining guided reading grouping and instruction and forms of running records are effective in assessing students reading level and abilities. All of the participating third grade teachers disagreed when presented with the question regarding the effectiveness of the SRI in correlation with guided reading.

Similar to the data collected from the second grade teachers, fourth grade teachers unianimously agreed upon four out of the five questions as being important to reading instruction. Based on the survey results, all of the fourth grade teachers agreed that guided reading was important when meeting individuals' needs, instructing students frequently in guided reading was important, and assessment results including running records are effective when grouping students and instructing them. While some teachers disagreed with the effectiveness of the SRI assessment in terms of guided reading, more agreed that it was an effective mode of assessment.

Classroom Practices According to Special Education Teachers and Reading Specialists

As illustrated in Table 3, Special Education teachers and Reading Specialist judged many of the same factors to be just as important as the general education teachers. These teachers agreed that the frequency of guided reading instruction should be high. Most of the special education teachers and reading specialists identified the SRI as being

an ineffective form of assessment when determining grouping of students for guided reading. In addition, general education teachers found the SRI electronic assessment to be ineffective when grouping students for guided reading as well. It was noted that general education teachers, special education teachers and reading specialists had common classroom practices as a whole.

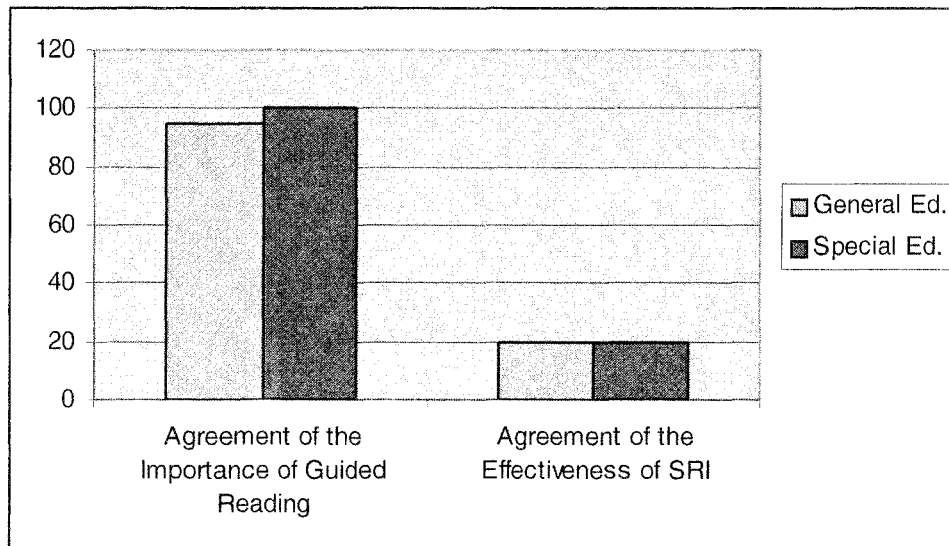


Figure 3. Classroom Practices of General Education Teachers, Special Education Teachers & Reading Specialists

Table 6

Classroom Practices Based on Grade Level Responses

Items on Classroom Practices	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Special Education Teachers & Reading Specialists
Guided reading is an important component of teaching children to read.				
Strongly Agree	50	-	50	100
Agree	50	75	50	-
Disagree	-	25	-	-
Strongly Disagree	-	-	-	-
A high frequency of teaching guided reading is important.				
Strongly Agree	100	-	80	17
Agree	-	75	20	83
Disagree	-	25	-	-
Strongly Disagree	-	-	-	-
Reading assessment results are important when determining skills to teach within guided reading.				
Strongly Agree	20	25	20	-
Agree	60	50	80	83
Disagree	-	25	-	17
Strongly Disagree	-	-	-	-
SRI is useful when determine grouping of students for guided reading.				
Strongly Agree	20	-	20	-
Agree	-	-	-	-
Disagree	60	100	60	100
Strongly Disagree	-	-	20	-
Running records are effective assessment tools to determine student grouping for guided reading.				
Strongly Agree	100	75	25	33
Agree	-	-	75	67
Disagree	-	25	-	-
Strongly Disagree	-	-	-	-

Chapter 5 - Discussion and Conclusions

The ways in which various teachers at the elementary level use assessment to promote progress of students in guided reading groups has been investigated in this study. The findings, discussion and conclusions will suggest ways for teachers to improve their teaching practices and determine which reading assessments best fits their needs when grouping students for guided reading. Grouping of students should be done in a manner that they are still experiencing rigor in instruction, which will in turn allow them to progress as readers. In this final chapter, the findings based on the study were synthesized across grade levels. This final chapter will highlight the commonalities and discrepancies among teachers at each grade level in terms of how assessment may inform guided reading practices in the elementary classroom.

Uses of Classroom Reading Assessments

Reading assessment is an important component in measuring a reader's growth and informing appropriate instruction at the elementary classroom. In the world of education today, there is a vast number of reading assessments that can be given. Students should be assessed in the areas of reading comprehension and fluency in order to group them appropriately in guided reading. Assessing helps teachers create "academically healthy students" (Grandal, 2003, p. 39).

At the location where the study was completed, teachers had an abundance of assessments that they could administer. Assessments ranged from traditional running record assessments to new computer based assessments, such as the SRI. Most grade levels also had access to the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy (DIBELS) to assess reading fluency. Based on the data collected from the survey, the second, third,

fourth and special education teachers all disagreed that DIBELS is used to drive their guided reading instruction. Despite its accuracy, DIBELS was new to the school district, which may explain the teachers' low opinion of it.

Teachers were also asked to agree or disagree with the statement, if they find using a form of running record to be an effective way to assess their students when grouping them and teaching in a guided reading group. The majority of all teachers, including special education agreed that a running record is useful and effective. Running records not only assess the level at which a child is reading by also assesses their comprehension. Even though these types of assessments can be time consuming when administered correctly, teachers felt that the information given is important in grouping and instructing their students in guided reading. Their responses align with Herbert's (2004) observation, "Running records are among the most effective means of assessing students in reading" (p. 30).

Assessment and Guided Reading

Assessment is an important factor when determining how and when to regroup students in guided reading. Based on the survey results, teachers are assessing their students frequently throughout the school year to track their progress and regroup students. As mentioned in the previous section, many of the teachers also used some form of running record a few times per year.

Results also indicated that teachers are assessing students using DIBELS a few times during the years. Teachers are assessing students three times per year in grades two, three and in the area of special education because it is mandated by the district; however, as stated in the previous section teachers are not using DIBELS to drive reading

instruction. The survey highlighted that most teachers are regrouping their students for guided reading based on the forms of assessment that track their students reading ability, which seems to be primarily running records. Even though the teachers had other forms of assessment available to them that track student assessment such as the SRI and DIBELS.

There has been a major discrepancy noted in terms of how SRI is used to assess, regroup students and drive reading instruction. In addition to DIBELS, the SRI is also a new assessment tool to the district, which has been introduced within the past year. This type of reading assessment may be difficult for students to take because it is administered on the computer. Special education teachers may have assumed the format of the assessment can decrease the students' likelihood of completing the assessment to their utmost ability. Some teachers use the SRI to assess the students on a monthly or bimonthly basis to track their reading in terms of lexiles provided by the SRI assessment. A chart including Proficient Lexile Ranges can be found in the appendix.

Implications

In education, nothing ever stays the same and it is the responsibility of the people in the profession of education to be informed of changes taking place. The results from this study can be useful to many individuals involved in a school district: Primarily teachers, administrations and students can benefit the most from the findings. Research has shown that early reading success sets the stage for students' academic achievement through out the educational years (McIntyre, E., Petroksko, J. & Powell P., et al., 2005). The assessment piece of literacy instruction is needed to determine ways to meet individual students needs.

Differentiated instruction in the area of reading is important to students' success. Much of educational emphasis is placed on the students and they are the ones who would truly benefit most from this study. Guided reading is a teaching practice that takes place in order to differentiate instruction and meet individual needs. The assessments that students are given should be analyzed carefully in order to guide them through the skills that they are still in need of becoming proficient at. Students who are assessed frequently are more likely to read at a proficient level.

By assessing students frequently, it truly takes the "guess work" out of teaching reading. Teachers have access to many different assessments. Assessments such as DIBELS, SRI and running records cover many of the components that need to be assessed in reading. It is very important that teachers use research-based assessment such as these to ensure quality. These types of reading assessments can also serve a purpose when implementing interventions among students because it creates an opportunity to create reading-skill-based groups within a couple of different grade levels. Skill-based grouping allows teachers to teach the particular reading skills that the student may be lacking.

At times administrators are at a disadvantage because they do not get a chance to know each student and their needs the way that a classroom teacher does. However, they are still responsible for being sure that each child's academic needs are being met. By having a variety of reading assessments in place, administrators can access the assessment results to determine a "best" educational placement for the students.

Limitations

This study examined the ways in which teachers use reading assessment in order to inform his / her reading instruction. A limitation of this study was the sample, which is limiting because this study took place at a single elementary school in a rural setting. Participants were selected based on convenience sampling. Only teachers that worked with students in grades two through four participated in the survey because these are the years when the majority of reading assessment occurs. The sample size could be expanded to other school districts or grade levels at the middle school.

The survey used in this study was self-created by solely by the researcher. This could be a limitation on the study because this was the first survey that the researcher created and it was the first time it had been used in a study; In the future revisions could be made to this survey in order to improve the data collection process.

In the future, to further this study, a researcher could investigate the implementation of the assessment tool, such as the SRI. Since this is a computer based assessment tool it may be challenging for some students. Students are not able to easily track words as they would when reading from paper. Some students simply are not familiar with using technology as part of an assessment. This could deter teachers from initially using this type of assessment as demonstrated by survey results.

Recommendations

In this study of different assessment tools and how they are used within guided reading instruction, the data revealed the frequency of administration and the usefulness of a variety of reading assessments. The area of reading instruction it is important to assess the students not only in the area of comprehension, but also fluency.

The most important concept that I learned from this study was that it is very important to assess students frequently, but it is even more important to use the assessment results to inform instruction. Teachers can assess students several times during the year, but without analyzing and using the assessment results, it is truly a waste of time for the teachers and the students. In this study I found that many teachers seem to simply assess students for the sake of doing so rather than using the data to inform instruction.

Appendix A: Survey Form

Upon completion of the survey, please print a hard copy of the survey. All surveys should remain anonymous and be placed in the envelope in my school mailbox.

What types of reading assessment do you use in your classroom? For each question check the appropriate box.

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
When assessing my students using the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI), I find it aids in informing my guided reading instruction.				
I use Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) to drive my guided reading practices.				
When assessing my students' reading ability, I use the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) or other form of running record to appropriately group students for guided reading.				
My students' common formative reading assessment results drive my guided reading practices.				
My weekly comprehension assessments affect the grouping of students or my instruction within guided reading?				

When implementing guided reading in your classroom, how often do you assess and regroup your students? For each question check the appropriate box.

	Never	Once or twice	A few times per year	Several times per year
How often do you use the <u>SRI</u> to assess your students?				
How often do you use <u>a form of running record</u> to assess your students?				
How often do you use <u>DIBELS</u> to assess your students' fluency?				
How often do you use <u>other forms of reading assessment</u> to assess your students' reading ability?				
How often do you <u>regroup students</u> within guided reading based on assessment results?				

How well does each of the following statements describe your practices in the classroom? For each statement check the appropriate box.

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Guided reading is important in order to meet my students' individual needs.				
It is important that I instruct my students in guided reading groups frequently.				
Reading assessment results help me to determine the skills I teach in guided reading.				
The SRI is a useful mode of assessment when determining the grouping of students in guided reading.				
Forms of running records are effective when grouping and teaching students in guided reading groups.				

Appendix B: Sample Lexile Measure for Reading

(Adapted from Lexile.com)

Grade	Reader Measures, Mid-Year 25th percentile to 75th percentile (IQR)
1	Up to 300L
2	140L to 500L
3	330L to 700L
4	445L to 810L
5	565L to 910L
6	665L to 1000L
7	735L to 1065L
8	805L to 1100L
9	855L to 1165L
10	905L to 1195L
11 and 12	940L to 1210L

Appendix C: Sample DIBELS Fluency Benchmarks

(Adapted from Second Grade Assessment Manual)

DIBELS Measures	Fall	Winter	Spring
Non-Sense Word Fluency	0 – 29: Deficit 30 – 49: Emerging 50 & above: Established	Not Administered	Not Administered
Oral Reading Fluency	0 – 25: At Risk 26 – 43: Some Risk 44 & above: Low Risk	0 – 51: At Risk 52 – 67: Some Risk 68 & above: Low Risk	0 – 69: At Risk 70 – 89: Some Risk 90 & above: Low Risk

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