

UNDERSTANDING A TITLE I READING PROGRAM: LITERACY STRATEGIES FOR
STRUGGLING READERS IN A FIRST AND SECOND GRADE CLASSROOM

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Abstract

Understanding a Title I Reading Program: Literacy Strategies for Struggling Readers in a First and Second Grade Classroom

Literacy affects all areas of life, therefore teachers point to it as the most essential building block of early learners. Early intervention and support is key because of the well documented long term effects of children's literacy skills during the critical early elementary years. There are certain predictors of children who are particularly at risk including those from high poverty homes, therefore, No Child Left Behind put into place reading assistance funding and guidelines for schools with lower SES populations in the form of Title I programs. Factors which have been found to impact the effectiveness of Reading Programs include: scientifically based reading strategies which are systematically implemented, teacher knowledge and training, and parental involvement. This qualitative case study is designed to understand the method and role of a Title I reading curriculum, LAP, and professional support and communication at home and school in improving literacy fluency. Participants include 24 students in a 1st and 2nd grade multiage classroom at Stanton Elementary School, but focus on five below-level readers in this multiage classroom. Participants are observed in the classroom and during pull outs for the Reading Program. Interviews with two classroom teachers and the Reading Specialist are also conducted. Data is collected through observations, interviews, and examination of the Reading Program materials and is analyzed in light of prior research. This study found that the Reading Program at Stanton incorporates scientifically-based reading instruction grounded in the work of Reading

Recovery and modified to accommodate resources and staffing. Classroom teachers were fully informed in reading instructional strategies and incorporated them into classroom instruction. Findings from this study showed that the largest factor in student success hinges on parental involvement in supporting students reading at home. Although the reading program and its components play a significant role in students' progress, the importance of factors such as classroom teacher's communication and knowledge seemed to pale in comparison to parental support.

Introduction

An hour before school begins, Joe walks into the reading room at Stanton, his elementary school. This third-grader spends the hour before school working on reading skills in hopes of catching up with his peers. Joe is from a middle class family who supports him and works hard to bridge the gap in his literacy fluency. Unfortunately, Joe is uncommon since parental support is missing for many students at Stanton and the majority of students in the reading program are from low-income homes.

Research has found that schools with a large population of students from low socioeconomic status (SES) often have a larger population of struggling readers (McCoach, O'Connell, Reis, & Levitt, 2006; Al Otaiba, Kosanovich-Grek, Torgesen, Hassler, & Wahl, 2005). Stanton is a Title I funded school, since over 40% of the population qualifies for a free/reduced lunch. The purpose of Title I as set forth by No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in their statement of purpose under heading #2, is to meet “the educational needs of low-achieving children in our Nation's highest-poverty schools, limited English proficient children, migratory children, children with disabilities, Indian children, neglected or delinquent children, and young children in need of reading assistance” (US Dept of Education, 2004). In my research I focus on the reading assistance Title 1 provides. Stanton utilizes, The Learning Assistance Program (LAP), which according to Washington’s Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction’s (OSPI) overview of Title I number nine, ensures that children are given “effective, scientifically-based instructional strategies and challenging academic content” as well as teacher

preparation and training (OSPI, n.d.). In my year-and-a-half involvement at Stanton, I encountered many teachers who feel disconnected from the LAP program. Many Stanton teachers struggle with how to help below grade level readers in the classroom setting.

This led me to several questions with regards to understanding how to foster literacy skills. These inquiries seek to explore classroom teacher training in literacy, understand the LAP reading program, scientifically based instruction components, and communication level between reading specialists, students' classroom teacher and parents? Examination of these elements in prior research will lay a foundation from which further investigation into literacy programs can take place.

Reading touches all subjects and affects all areas of learning. For this reason teachers agree, reading is the most important skill that students can acquire in school (Reed, Marchand-Martella, Martella, & Kolts, 2007). This qualitative study explores elements of the most effective scientifically based early reading programs for struggling students, instructional strategies, as well as home and school communication and involvement. Fundamental components of the Stanton Elementary Title I reading program are examined in light of current research. I hypothesized that students with the greatest amount of parental involvement and communication between reading specialist, home and school will grow the most in their literacy skills regardless of the components of the program.

Literature Review

Research demonstrates early literacy skills correlate with performance in reading as well as many other subjects in later grades (McCoach, O'Connell, Reis, & Levitt, 2006). These students continue to struggle throughout their school years (McCoach, O'Connell, Reis, & Levitt, 2006). "Converging research has shown that reading trajectories are established early, and once established, they are difficult to change" (Al Otaiba, Kosanovich-Grek, Torgesen, Hassler, & Wahl, 2005, p. 378). Children who begin school with limited literacy skills are typically the ones who struggle to learn to read (McCoach, O'Connell, Reis, & Levitt, 2006). This gap between poor and strong readers tends to widen over the elementary years (Al Otaiba, Kosanovich-Grek, Torgesen, Hassler, & Wahl, 2005, p. 20). There are certain predictors of children who are particularly at risk, including those from high poverty homes.

The relationship between parental SES and reading achievement has been well documented and is a good predictor of children's reading skills (McCoach, O'Connell, Reis, & Levitt, 2006). Children from poverty, minority, and English as a Second Language backgrounds are much less likely to reach basic levels of reading (Vadasy & Sanders, 2008). In addition, the achievement gap in reading tends to widen over the summer between high and low SES children (McCoach, O'Connell, Reis, & Levitt, 2006). This trend suggests that home life plays a large role in literacy skills. McCoach et al. state that "differences among schools may be largely a function of the differences among their students prior to school entry, and that the widening of the achievement gap may result from differential growth rates during non-instructional periods" (McCoach, O'Connell, Reis, & Levitt, 2006).

Reading is of utmost importance in our schools and in society as a whole, yet statistics show that a high percentage of students continue to struggle with reading. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) found that 34% of fourth grade students nationwide did not meet the National Assessment of Educational Progress basic reading requirements in 2007. This is not all bad news, since this figure is actually down from 40% of fourth graders who did not meet nationwide basic reading requirements in 2002 (IES National Center for Educational Statistics, 2007). Since No Child Left Behind went into effect in 2001 a large amount of research has focused on effective reading programs and components. Perhaps these figures show that we have found some common elements to help struggling readers.

The National Reading Panel (NRP) found that improving teacher knowledge regarding reading instruction is critical in helping children learn to read at or above grade level by the end of third grade (Al Otaiba, Kosanovich-Grek, Torgesen, Hassler, & Wahl, 2005). Likewise Greenlee and Bruner found that the most important element in producing literacy gains is “high-ability” teaching (2001). A national survey found that many elementary teachers were unsure of how to assist struggling readers and rated this as one of their greatest challenges (Duffy-Hester, 1999). Most contemporary reading programs recognize the importance of teacher training.

Title 1 guidelines emphasized disadvantages of pull-outs and swept in an instructional paradigm shift, moving from pulling at-risk students out of the classroom for instructional time with a reading specialist to in-class, parallel instruction and team-

teaching instruction involving the classroom teacher (Gupta & Oboler, 2001). This is difficult to implement on many levels. Although team-teaching is encouraged through Title I, it is not mandated, therefore pull-outs have continued in many schools. Title I calls on Reading Specialists to provide staff development and training in reading, as well as involve parents (Gupta & Oboler, 2001).

Parental involvement is a key aspect of literacy growth according to Title I legislation. For this reason Title I requires schools to develop a written parental involvement policy also called a school-parent compact (Gupta & Oboler, 2001). Legislation encourages schools to support parental participation through involving families in significant curriculum decisions, instruction, assessment, and educating families about how they can help improve their child's reading skills (Gupta & Oboler, 2001). Studies have also found long term success rates for students who receive individual attention through volunteer tutoring programs (Burns, Senesac, & Silberglitt, 2008). One possible reason for this is that the development of literacy skills necessitates individual attention which can be most readily sustained at home with the support of the reading specialist and classroom teacher. Burns et al. believe that one-to-one reading instruction has advantages over small-group instructional settings since it allows the child more opportunity to respond and receive immediate feedback, which they describe as critical in guiding the struggling reader in expanding reading strategies (2008).

Real reading experiences in abundance are a must for beginning readers. “Real” reading is defined as reading whole texts while applying literacy strategies, as opposed to filling in workbook pages or answering comprehension questions (Taberski, 2000, p. 5). Taberski states that children “need large blocks of time at school and at home to read” therefore classrooms and home lives of children can work together to give either an advantage or disadvantage through the practice of reading (2000, p. 5). Vadasy and Sanders found that children lacking in early literacy experiences are prone to deficits in early reading skills and tend to have difficulty catching up in the classroom (2008).

Home life experience is imperative for building childrens’ schema or background knowledge. Schema is defined by Miller as: activating relevant, prior knowledge; beforehand, during, and after reading (Miller, 2002, p. 8). Taberski believes that the life experiences a child brings to the text provides the framework he or she needs to foster literacy skills (2000, p. 8).

Children expect text to make sense. The closer the content is to their own experiences or a subject they know a lot about, the more capable they are at anticipating what will happen next –even which words might be used- and drawing implications for their own lives (Taberski, 2000, p. 3).

Schema accounts for a large portion of text comprehension, one of the core components of reading programs.

Scientifically Based Reading Research (SBRR) found five core instructional components to reading programs including: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary

development, fluency, and text comprehension which they believe should be explicitly and systematically taught (Al Otaiba, Kosanovich-Grek, Torgesen, Hassler, & Wahl, 2005; Reed, Marchand-Martella, Martella, & Kolts, 2007). Reading specialists, like Taberski agree, the best way to lay a foundation for children to read is through systematic instruction (2000, p. xv) Systematic instruction in reading involves careful selection of sets of letter-sound relationships that are arranged into logical sequence (Reed, Marchand-Martella, Martella, & Kolts, 2007). The first three skills, according to Reed et al., (phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency) are often conveyed as decoding skill or “learning to read” while the final two relate more to “reading to learn” (2007).

Short, Kane and Peeling state that early intervention programs, such as Reading Recovery, which are initiated with low-ability readers in the first semester of first-grade, have the ability to accelerate the progress of at-risk students (2000). Components of successful programs include exploring patterns and structures of written language, writing, working with letter sound and words and reading opportunities at instructional and independent levels (Short, Kane, & Peeling, 2000).

Reading fluency is involved in comprehension since it “frees students to understand (comprehend) what they read” (Reed, Marchand-Martella, Martella, & Kolts, 2007). Reading specialists debate about when to teach comprehension strategies, but some like Miller, believe comprehension and decoding should be taught side by side (2002, p. 49). Taberski agrees that children should be encouraged to use “all the information sources available as they read—meaning, structure, and graphophonics”

so that they will “approach reading as a meaning making activity” (2000, p. 3). Miller recommends capitalizing on beginning reader’s enthusiasm of learning and using new words by using the same instructional strategies to teach comprehension as decoding (2002, p. 50). These strategies include: explicit instruction, modeling, reading high-quality literature and children’s writing, and giving children time to practice reading and writing (Miller, 2002, p. 50).

Emerging research on effective teaching practices has described six attributes of effective reading teachers:

1. Use of more small-group work to differentiate instruction.
2. Keeping children on-task for a large percentage of the time.
3. Spending more time explicitly teaching alphabetic principles.
4. Scaffolding or coaching students during reading, especially in regard to decoding strategies.
5. Explicitly teaching high-order thinking questions during comprehension instruction.
6. Selecting texts with diverse genres which are based on the students needs.

(Al Otaiba, Kosanovich-Grek, Torgesen, Hassler, & Wahl, 2005). Small group instruction which focuses on rereading familiar texts promotes the development of automatic reading as well as allowing students opportunity to apply their knowledge of phonics, syntax, and semantics (Short, Kane, & Peeling, 2000). Short, et al. note the importance

of teachers incorporating writing for beginning readers because of the reciprocal relationship between reading and writing (2000). Writing requires analysis therefore it can be an ideal context for phonics as well as attending to individual units or “chunks” of words (Short, Kane, & Peeling, 2000). Teachers who explicitly teach multiple strategies for decoding unfamiliar text are most effective with struggling readers (Short, Kane, & Peeling, 2000).

Another vital element in reading programs involves student interest based books. Miller is a strong advocate for allowing students choice in their reading selection and engaging them in subjects that interest them (2002, p. 43). Taberski concurs that providing enjoyable books, combined with engaging instructional methods are the only “effective vehicles for developing children’s reading skills” (2000, p. 12). When allowing students to choose books teachers should consider the selections’ content, offer a variety of selections and bear in mind children’s schema and motivation (Miller, 2002, p. 41).

A unique reading enrichment program, The School-wide Enrichment Model in Reading Framework (SEM-R), is one such program. Students are exposed to books in their area of interest which they engage in a period of enjoyable, challenging individual silent reading and enriched reading activities (Reis, McCoach, Coyne, Schreiber, Eckert, & Gubbins, 2007). They are also involved in read-aloud opportunities daily which have been found to be lacking in many low-SES schools and classrooms (Gupta & Oboler, 2001). Most importantly reading programs based on choice, read aloud, challenging and

interest based books may break down some of the barriers that hinder minority students including “low expectations, culturally limited curriculum, and lack of respect for diversity” (Reis, McCoach, Coyne, Schreiber, Eckert, & Gubbins, 2007).

A sobering question which arises in the research literature is, “Can all students learn to read well?” (Duffy-Hester, 1999). Duffy-Hester answers this question with a resounding yes if the child is involved in exemplary classroom and reading support services (1999). Reis et al. concur that research suggests all students can learn to read at high levels but, “may be hindered by societal and individual barriers” (2007). Since early literacy skills are reliable predictors of students achievement in later grades (Meier & Sullivan, 2004), I focus this study on first and second graders who are struggling to read with the belief that every child, with proper help, can become a proficient reader.

Research Question

Research clearly implicates certain factors as contributing to higher or lower literacy skills in children. These elements range from SES, parental involvement, phonic proficiency at the start of kindergarten, effective classroom and reading teacher instructional practices, variation in reading programs, and communication among professionals and school home connection. Reading impacts all subjects and its influence can be felt in all areas of learning. With so much at stake and well documented long term effects of children’s literacy skills during the most critical time- the early elementary years- funding and research has increased in this area. Some of the contributors such as SES and proficiency at the start of grade school cannot be altered

by the classroom teacher; therefore my desire is to focus on understanding and effectively implementing the reading program already in place to help these children.

This study primarily seeks to explore the nature and process of the literacy program which Title I is offering struggling readers in 1st and 2nd grade at Stanton, a public school. The review of literature leaves me with several questions focused on understanding the role of curriculum, professional and parental support and communication in enhancing literacy skills. What type of training is provided for classroom teachers at Stanton Elementary? Is the LAP reading program, which is overseen by a reading specialist, but implemented, by a teacher's assistant and the reading specialist based on proven reading strategies? How much communication does the reading specialist have with students' classroom teacher and parents? Do students progress in reading fluency?

Methodology

Method and Rationale

This qualitative study is designed to understand the method and role of a Title I reading curriculum, LAP, and professional support and communication at home and school in improving literacy fluency. Due to the descriptive nature of this research, a qualitative case study is the most appropriate methodology. Case study refers to research of an individual or small group of participants in which the researcher draws conclusions only from within the setting or context of the study itself. Therefore this study will not focus on generalizable truth, or cause-and-effect relationships; rather on

describing and understanding the nature of the LAP reading program and its effectiveness.

Sample

Participants include 24 students in a 1st and 2nd grade multiage classroom at Stanton Elementary School. The non-traditional multiage program at Stanton pairs two grades together in one classroom; therefore, this is a single classroom that is composed of both 1st and 2nd graders. I specifically work with the below grade level reader population of this multiage classroom. Stanton is located within city limits in a rural/small town community in the Pacific Northwest. Stanton has a high minority, specifically Hispanic population and is a Title I funded school. Some of the participants are English Language Learners (ELL).

Participants are observed in the classroom and pulled out for LAP instructional time. The reading program documents are reviewed in light of current research regarding effective instructional reading strategies. At least two classroom teachers are interviewed, one a 1st grade and the other will be the 1st/2nd grade teacher of the participants. The 1st/2nd grade teacher worked as a Teacher's Assistant (TA) in Stanton's LAP program for a number of years before becoming a certified classroom teacher. The 1st grade teacher is included to obtain a more general feel for a teacher who has not had specific experience working solely in a literacy program. The Reading Specialist and assistants are also interviewed in order to understand the process of the program and

breadth of communication. Curriculum is reviewed for parental components and involvement.

Researcher

I have been involved with some of these children since Kindergarten in my time volunteering at Stanton Elementary School. My son has been friends with two of the children in this study and one child has been to our home on several occasions for play dates. This is an advantage in one way due to my experience with some of the children and their familiarity with me working in the classroom since the time they entered grade school. This could also contribute to biases on my part, since I truly care about these children on a personal level.

Instrumentation

Data is collected through observations, interviews, and examination of reading program material. Observations are made in the classroom setting during reading instruction and literacy activities. I kept careful notes of what was done and said, as well as how it was done. Observations take place in the Reading Room with the Reading Specialist (RS) and Teacher Assistant (TA). I look for systematic implementation of literacy instructions.

The LAP reading program material is examined in light of current research of effective reading programs. Systematically taught components of phonemic awareness,

phonics, vocabulary development, fluency and text comprehension is investigated. A component of enjoyable student-interest based books is also considered.

Informal interviews are conducted with the 1st/2nd grade classroom teacher on multiple occasions regarding progress with the participants, her thoughts on the LAP literacy program, and issues with the participants as they arise. Specific questions which are covered during the interview process include:

1. How many times a month does the Reading Specialist communicate with you?
2. Are you informed of lesson plans or what is covered during LAP pull out time?
3. Are you involved in communication between students' parents and the Reading Specialist?
4. What sort of literacy training is given to you? By whom? How frequently?
5. What is typical of the progress in reading fluency for a child who is not at grade level once they enter the program?

Informal interviews are conducted with the Reading Specialist regarding her experience in this reading program and possibly with other programs. Specific questions covered include:

1. Have you ever worked with an in-classroom reading program where you and the classroom teacher co-teach?

2. How much do you work with the classroom teachers and how often do you communicate with them?
3. How involved are the parents and how often do you communicate with them?
4. Are you involved with literacy training for staff including classroom teachers and TA's
5. What is typical of the progress in reading fluency for a child who is not at grade level once they enter the program?

One interview is recorded to provide a source of credibility for the information that is gathered. Recording rather than note taking during interviews also allows for a freer flow of conversation. One interview was conducted with students present and therefore was not recorded. The 1st grade teacher opted to utilize email to answer interview questions. Notes taken from observations with participants are triangulated with interviews to ensure that the information and conclusions drawn from this information are valid. Conclusions drawn from this study are triangulated with prior research literature on reading programs.

The utmost care is taken to protect participants and educators identity. Names of people and places are altered. Participants are assigned a number in data records. Anonymity of participants involved in any study is standard, but even more so when working with children.

Procedures

Data gathered from interviews and observations is analyzed in light of prior research. I transcribe interviews and compare them with notes taken from observations. Patterns of systematic implementation of the reading program and literacy instruction during LAP and classroom time are analyzed for consistency or lack thereof. Comparison of the classroom and reading teacher views are made in order to understand similarities and differences in viewpoints. The LAP reading program itself is examined in light of current scientifically based literacy programs for similarity of proven components. These components include, but are not limited to; phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, fluency, and text comprehension. Classroom teacher training in instructional literacy strategies is also examined. Finally, communication between home and school, as well as classroom teacher and reading specialist are analyzed through students' reading logs and interviews. I review the data collected to focus on patterns as they emerge.

Data

Raw Data

The following interviews are conducted with the Reading Specialist, 1st/2nd grade teacher, and 1st grade teacher. The first includes excerpts from an unrecorded interview with the Reading Specialist who runs the LAP program, from which notes were taken:

“We have small groups which I try to limit to no more than three students... Students vary, but typically reach grade level in one to one and a half years, but ELL student may take longer because we must teach them the vocabulary, and there is such a language

barrier... Student materials to use at home include a bag with up to three new books that is on their easy to instructional reading level, a reading log for parents to record how fluently the child read the book with them, and an area to sign and date with any additional comments. At the beginning of the year parents are given a guide to reading strategies we are teaching their child and how to help them choose the best strategy when they are stuck on a new word. In addition to this parents are given my website which covers in detail many questions they may encounter when guiding their child through the reading process. There is a huge difference when students have support at home. The biggest difference is in ELL kids who get parental support at home... I have offered parents and teacher assistants a reading class mostly on beginning reading strategies, "language." I have also conducted teacher training on Running Records and made sure that teachers are using the same reading strategies in their classrooms that we use in here: Eagle Eye, Lips the Fish, Stretchy Snake, Chunky Monkey, Skippy Frog, Tryin' Lion, Helpful Kangaroo (see definitions of strategies below in parental information). I also have a compilation of notes I have taken from literacy conferences and research I've read on best practices in reading that I pass along to teachers... Classroom teachers are emailed to discuss questions or concerns as often as needed. They are also encouraged to come in and see assessments, lesson plans, and running records on their students. Formally I send the classroom teacher and parents of each student a progress report every quarter."

The following excerpts are transcribed from a recorded interview conducted with the 1st/2nd grade teacher of the students followed in this study:

“Q: Do students who receive more support at home tend to make better gains? A: Yes!

I have noticed a trend in that direction definitely. That's one of the wonderful things about Title I reading program is that the students take a bag with a new book home each week and they've practiced it with someone at least once in Reading Club so that they're feeling successful at it. Then they take it home to their parents and read it and feel like they are a successful reader. This helps them buy into the program more. It's always books that are at their level and not too hard...the Reading program helps set it up so that parents who want to read with their child every night can and it makes it so much easier. And those children really do make much higher gains. Student 1 read to his Dad and his father can't read in English at all, he can speak some English, but cannot read in English. His father told me that he really wants to help him but he can't read in English so I told him to just listen to him read and he does. He reads to his Dad, his Dad has no idea what the page says, but Student 1 does and he read a book to me today and didn't need hardly any help... He may not be able to read to him, but he listens to him and shows him that he thinks learning to read is important. What I told him through a translator at conferences is that if you listen to him read, that's helping him... Student 4 too, is a 2nd grader who made great gains last year, but she got to level ten or twelve and just stayed at that level. She tries and reads at home, but she's always picking easy books, and her Mom didn't realize that she should kind of bump her up a little bit... it's not that she wasn't getting the help in the classroom, it was just more independent there and here she wasn't able to get the individualized attention... some kids really need the extra support, they need twice the time to get to that same level, but I need to

be able to touch in with all my students and check in on comprehension. So I can't only spend time with the lower students... Q: So the person that parents are in communication the most with is you? Like for parent conferences? A: Yeah, she doesn't come to parent conferences but if they want to they can set up an appointment with her, and I've had parents go down like you did and watch their child to see what they do. And if a parent expresses concern that their child is missing stuff in the classroom, I try to tell them that they are getting so much where they are going. And if there's a time where they can I encourage them to go down and watch what they are doing with them. The Reading Specialist and TA are very open to that. Fine tuning that individual attention and individual instruction. Q: The Reading Specialist told me the program is based on Reading Recovery Model, but modified for very small groups. I found a study that showed that that the very small groups of no more than three students were as effective as individual instruction. A: Yeah, and we just can't do that in the classroom."

The following excerpts are from an email interview conducted with a 1st grade teacher at Stanton:

"1. How often does the Reading Specialist communicate with you regarding your Reading Club kids? A: At the beginning of the school year we (the teachers) share our "Smart Start" testing information. This includes letter identification, sounds, and sight words, concepts about print and estimated reading levels. Students are chosen to participate based on these scores and information from their former teachers. Once in

the program, the RS has an open door policy... Most communication is informal. The RS may have experienced a break through with a child and will share this info with us to celebrate. If she is experiencing difficulty with a child (attention issues, emotional issues, and homework issues) she will talk to the teacher for advice/help. This also goes the other way. Her input is very valuable as she sees the kids four days a week, 45 minutes a day. We communicate informally (hallway or email) about once every three to four weeks about a child's level... Instructional practices in the classroom mimic Reading Club practices. RS is the specialist and we all strive to be as good as her... The difference in Reading Club is that the time is more focused (one teacher to six kids rather than one teacher to about 15) with fewer interruptions. The kids are pulled during our classroom reading time and return to the classroom for 20 more minutes of reading time. This is when I meet with Reading Club kids (twice a week) to check their levels and progress. If I notice a child is having difficulty or is not making progress, I will often go to the RS to ask what she observes... RS communicates with the parents via a reading log in each child's reading bag. She also sends home a report at progress report times and report card times. Parents are welcome to contact RS at any time regarding their child's progress. They are also welcome to visit the reading room. The classroom teacher is also welcome to do this. Another factor that impacts a child's reading development is support at home. Children who do their Reading Club homework each night as well as their weekly classroom homework tend to show more progress. My experience has been that kids who participate in Reading Club make more steady progress than if they were to not participate in Reading Club. In reading club they

participate in a small group without many interruptions. Their instruction is targeted at them for a concentrated time. As a classroom teacher I meet with each non-reading club group twice a week for 30 minutes each time (one hour total). Reading Club kids get 45 minutes four times a week with the RS and 15 minutes twice a week with the teacher (three and a half hours total). Because of this, their progress is often better with Reading Club instruction as their instruction time more than doubles for the week. Of course a child's progress also depends on the child."

The following includes the progression of activities I observed during Reading Club. Students enter room with bag containing books and reading log (if they remember) and find a spot to read quietly on the floor. The Reading Assistant calls the focus student to the table first to work on a specific strategy. TA then calls two other students to her table and guides small group. Lesson includes: teacher asking student to come up with a strategy when they encounter a word they don't know, picture walk, partially covered words, writing words on white board: it, is, can, he, etc., framing words in the book with their fingers, cut up sentence: child reads sentence on strip of paper as the teacher cuts it up and then child puts the "puzzle" back together, word families, and also cutting "word chunks" apart such as: flood-ing.

Running records are utilized in Reading Club and throughout the elementary school. I had the opportunity to observe several running records in the classroom and Reading Club, as well as view a video for teachers of how to give a running record. Typically running records are timed as in this excerpt: "Teacher presses timer as Student

5 reads, teacher marks paper with checks when he reads word correctly, teacher writes SC when student self-corrects, or writes incorrectly pronounced word over correct word when student mispronounces. Score is tallied by number of words over numbers of errors, however, self-corrects do not count.” The student’s ability to retell the story is also factored into the score.

The purpose of the running record includes: “1. To identify strategies and sources of information the child is using to construct meaning from the text, and what needs to be taught next. 2. To monitor progress by capturing reading behavior that can be analyzed at a time, and keep record of change and growth over time. 3. To determine if the level of text difficulty is appropriate. 4. To implement fluid grouping for strategy lessons. 5. To evaluate your own teaching. 6. To provide information to teachers and parents.”

Parental guides and support include leaflets, pamphlets and a website. Reading strategies are defined for parents including: Eagle Eye- look at the pictures for clues, Lips the Fish- get your mouth ready to say the first sounds then read and say it again, Stretchy Snake- stretch out the word slowly then put the sounds together, Chunky Monkey- look for a chunk that you know (-at, -an) or for a word part (-ing, -er), Skippy Frog- skip the word and read to the end of the sentence, then hop back and read it again, Tryin’ Lion- try to reread the sentence and try a word that makes sense, Helpful Kangaroo- ask for help after you have tried all the other strategies. The website includes prompts parents can say to their child when they are stuck on a word, encourages

parents to let their child read to them as well as reading to their child. It also lists literacy building websites for students and their parents to explore at home. The framework for daily instruction and its purpose is clearly defined in parental paperwork. Daily instruction includes: familiar reading, word work, signs for sounds, interactive writing to independent writing, running record, new book, focus student, and home reading program. The “Daily Reading Homework” sheet is available in Spanish and English for ELL families.

Data on the frequency of parental or familial representation in reading logs from January 5 to April 27, 2009 include: Student 1- 53 books, Student 2- 23 books, Student 3- 28 books, Student 4- 56 books, Student 5- 55 books.

Student reading level progress from January to April 2009:

| Name/Date | Jan 5 | Feb 2 | March 16 | April 2 | April 27 |
|-----------|-------|-------|----------|---------|----------|
| Student 1 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 7 | 10 |
| Student 2 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 7 | 8 |
| Student 3 | 9 | 10 | 12 | 13 | 13 |
| Student 4 | 18 | 20 | 24 | 24 | 28 |
| Student 5 | 16 | 20 | 24 | 24 | 24 |

*Number Represents Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) Reading Level

Analysis

The LAP Reading Program at Stanton complies with most aspects encouraged in Title I legislation. Reading Club incorporates scientifically based instruction grounded in the work of Reading Recovery and modified to accommodate resources and staffing at Stanton. The first three skills found in SBRR referred to as “learning to read” (phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency) are the spring board skills Reading Club teaches to bolster beginning readers (Reed, Marchand-Martella, Martella, & Kolts, 2007). One such strategy referenced in the data involves Lips the Fish, a phonics technique for saying the beginning letter sound. Another strategy includes Stretchy Snake which teaches students how to break down a word phonetically and then slide the sounds together. Running Records help students, staff and parents monitor fluency. These along with the other strategies which give students other options for unknown words which may or may not be decodable, like Skippy Frog, help students understand the focus is on reading to learn and understanding what is read. A full list of reading strategies, which are included in the data, I observed being systematically taught and implemented both in Reading Club and the classroom.

Furthermore, during observations in Reading Club I witnessed at least four of the six attributes of effective reading teachers (Al Otaiba, Kosanovich-Grek, Torgesen, Hassler, & Wahl, 2005). The first was small group work that differentiates instruction, which Reading Club takes a step further by having a focus student each day for more individualized attention. The importance of individualized attention was noted by all

interviewees. The 1st/2nd grade teacher stated that in Reading Club the students benefit from the RS's "fine tuning that individual attention and individual instruction." Second students are exposed to diverse genres which are based on student needs, including fiction and non-fiction. Thirdly, the RS and TA consistently scaffold students during reading pointing back to the strategies or before reading by working on specific words and sounds. Finally, students remain focused and on task probably due to the small group setting. This was noted by the 1st grade teacher who underscored the importance of the very small groups in Reading Club stating, "The difference in Reading Club is that the time is more focused... with fewer interruptions."

The benefits of individualized attention serves as the basis for emphasizing the importance of parental involvement, another requirement of Title I. Parents must give their approval in order for students to receive help in Reading Club. A class for new parents on beginning reading strategies is offered by the Reading Specialist as noted in the interview. The LAP program provides important resources and support for parents who wish to scaffold their child's reading skills at home. Parent resources include a guide to all reading strategies and how they are used, as well as books from various genres which are based on student's interest at students' independent to instructional level. Included with the school to home packet is a reading log which parents are asked to record the fluency with which their child read the book and a section for comments which in some cases became a daily dialogue between the Reading Specialist and parent.

Another requirement of Title I involves professional support and communication. The NPR found that developing teacher knowledge in reading instruction is critical in helping students learn to read (Al Otaiba, Kosanovich-Grek, Torgesen, Hassler, & Wahl, 2005). The Reading Specialist offers teachers training on Running Records, reading strategies and their systematic implementation in the classroom, as well as helpful tips she has compiled from literacy conferences and her own research on best practices in reading. In my observations in both classrooms teachers implemented and strategically taught the same reading strategies the Specialist used. Finally although communication between the RS and classroom teachers was informal, teachers seemed to generally be pleased with the level of communication with the Reading Specialist. They were notified typically through email when students made progress or were encountering a problem and both classroom teachers were extremely knowledgeable regarding student activities in Reading Club (see interview with 1st and 1st/2nd grade teachers). The 1st grade teacher however seemed somewhat unaware of how much instruction was given by the TA in Reading Club due to her reference to only the RS teaching small groups of six, when in actuality the groups are split between the RS and TA into two groups of three students. This however, was the only misunderstanding of the program that I found conveyed by the classroom teacher.

The pull out component of Reading Club is the most significant modification from Title I's suggested format; however, Stanton tries to compensate for the pulling students out of the classroom by timing the pullout to match the classroom's literacy instruction. In this way students are not missing other subjects and are getting more

individualized attention where they need it most. The 1st/2nd grade teacher states, “it’s not that she wasn’t getting help in the classroom... she just wasn’t able to get the individualized attention” a key component according to Burns et. al. (2007). The 1st grade teacher concurred stating, “As a classroom teacher I meet with each non-reading club group twice a week for 30 minutes each time (1 hour total). Reading Club kids get 45 minutes four times a week with the RS and 15 minutes twice a week with the teacher (3 ½ hours total). Because of this, their progress is often better with Reading Club instruction as their instruction time more than doubles for the week.”

Individualized attention most naturally occurs when parents become involved. The Reading Specialist emphasized, “there is a huge difference when students have support at home.” Parental support was analyzed through student reading logs. As hypothesized students with the most support at home, whose parents consistently listened to them read books from Reading Club made the highest gains during the study. Student 1, for example, is an ELL student whose parents do not speak any English and are not literate, but they value the program and came to conferences with a translator where the teacher communicated the value of just listening to their child read. “He (Father) may not be able to read to him, but he listens to him and shows him that he thinks learning to read is important. What I told him through a translator at conferences is that if you listen to him read, that’s helping him” (1st/2nd grade teacher). Student 1, a first grader, read 53 books and jumped from level three books in January to level 10 books in April. The difference is striking when compared to Student 3, who is also an ELL student whose parents are also unable to read in English, yet do not provide support at

home. Student 3, a second grader read only 28 books beginning at a level nine in January and ending at a level 13 in April.

This pattern of lesser gains with less parental support can also be seen in Student 2, a first grade bilingual student whose single parent is fluent in both English and Spanish. Student 2's parent has not been actively involved with his reading and when asked by the RS to read daily was offended. This caused an even greater lack of communication between home and school. Student 2, however, made slightly better gains than Student 3, even though he read only 23 Reading Club books. In January he started at a level three, but by April he reached level eight. Although he attained one more level than Student 3, it is possible that the difference is mainly due to proficiency in English rather than other factors.

All five students followed a similar pattern where students with the most support at home made the highest gains, conversely students with the least support made lesser gains. The importance of classroom teacher communication and knowledge seemed to pale in comparison to this factor, however, if reading strategies used in Reading Club were not also systematically implemented into the classroom students may not have made as much progress.

This case study will benefit me, as a new teacher, in thoroughly understanding the process of learning in Reading Club and the importance of focusing on the same reading strategies in the classroom. I will also be able to whole heartedly recommend

the reading program to parents and encourage their involvement both at home and school.

Implications

In light of the overwhelming gains evident when parents become involved and supportive, I recommend changes which would foster more formalized parental training and communication between the RS and parents. First, I would recommend that when parents agree to allow their child into the program they must also agree: to come to parent training on the program and reading strategies at the beginning of the year and read with their child at least 30 minutes a day. Second, I would ask for parent volunteers in the reading club not only to benefit students, but to further help parents refine implementation of the reading strategies so they can better help their child at home. Finally, I recommend quarterly parent/Reading Specialist conferences, which in many cases will require a translator so that parents maximize communication and can ask questions they may have regarding the quarterly progress report.

Teachers do not have the ability to change parental reading practices, but we are able to influence parents by encouraging their involvement and sharing the huge gains we have witnessed in struggling readers when parents actively support their child's reading. We can also support struggling readers by familiarizing ourselves with the intricacies of our school's reading program and implementing the same reading strategies in the classroom. This qualitative case study has benefited me in providing a solid foundation for implementation of best practices in reading.

Conclusion

Literacy affects all areas of life therefore teachers point to it as the most essential building block of early learners. Yet, 34 % of our nations' fourth grade students continue to fall behind in basic reading skills (IES National Center for Educational Statistics, 2007). Research implicates certain elements in reading programs as being more effective than others. Some of these components, referred to in research literature as scientifically based reading strategies, include: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, fluency, diverse text and text comprehension. Systematic and logical implementation of the program is also a vital element.

This study addressed these elements in the classroom, reading program, and student's home. I found that although the reading program and its components play a significant role in students' progress, the level of parental support and involvement led to the most growth in students' literacy skills. Research into reading programs is vital since reading impacts all subjects and its influence can be felt in all areas of learning. With so much at stake and with the well documented long term effects of children's literacy skills during the critical early elementary years this study hopes to benefit teachers in understanding the nature and process of a literacy program which Title I is offering struggling readers.

This project also suggests further research. Exploring parental involvement further, seeking to better understand the effects on children's reading skills would be a helpful avenue of future study. It may be helpful, here, to observe parental practices in

reading at home as well as conducting interviews with parents. A larger sample of students from various reading programs may also help strengthen the findings of this study that parental support is the key element in student success.

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