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Comprehension and Focus

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Introduction

Numerous studies have been conducted over the years comparing different reading techniques to determine which style is best for the students. Individual reading is seen in a strong light to be a good option for students. Yet research reveals a very strong argument can be substantiated for partner reading in the K-2 classroom (Flint, 2010). Another determinant in the study of learning styles and their effectiveness would be the focus on those students who represent English Language Learners (ELL). The data reveals some information that certain conclusions have merit. In this paper we will discuss what are the options, the data, and some conclusions for upcoming K-2 classrooms.

In any classroom across the nation, reading difficulties are going to abound. With all the stimulation from mass media, television, iPads, iPods and so forth, the average youngster in class does not spend a lot of quality time reading at home. The children that come to a K-2 classroom are going to have a wide range of reading skills. Not only are their skills at different levels but their backgrounds and ethnicity will play a part in their reading. With diversity in ethnicity and also linguistic differences, we need to notice that it can have some important value to all school classrooms. With that comes also academic diversity, which can create many challenges for the student as well as the instructor (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005). It is obvious in today's classroom; the teacher is challenged by the student mix and by the wide range of academic diversity. Reading is difficult enough for the average K-2 student, then add the difficulty some language barriers bring, some significant family issues or lack of family, and then add into the mix a media saturated society, and we now have an overwhelming challenge of inspiring a young student to

master or just improve their reading skill and comprehension. It has also been noted that if a student has significant reading difficulties at the end of the first year, it is likely those difficulties will continue to the fourth grade (Wright, 1992). The research of this paper is to try and improve that statistic or realization.

Literature

Something that has been discussed and studied over the years is the idea of partnered reading, or what some call the “buddy reading” concept (Flint, 2010). The goal surely would be that every student master reading to the level they need in order to be successful in all subjects. There is some good news in the research that offers hope to the K-2 classroom teachers.

By partnering students together for reading, several positive outcomes develop. It has been noted that young children are motivated when reading to an older peer tutor (Wright, 1992). Not only does this add motivation to the learning process but the older student is enhanced as well. The older student has their reading skill challenged and reinforced, while the younger peer is motivated and reinforced as well. This type of learning strategy or opportunity adds to the fulfillment of student, older peer, parent, and teacher. When learning at this level and the positive outlook of parents and teachers, this makes for a winning situation in the curve of learning and development.

Another option that has considerable merit is the idea of matching students, or pairing students with similar reading and language development. This allows both students to feel comfortable in the ongoing exchanges (Ogle & Correa-Kovton, 2010). By pairing up students on the same level, it allows students to enter another component of learning and development. What is meant by this is that children seem to do better with their development in school when it is

inviting and socially rewarding. One-on-one experiences make children feel more confident and interested in the learning arrangement (Ibid.).

Studies and observations have shown that by pairing up students to assist each other, then both students become engaged and learning is enhanced. With the introduction of a system called PALS-R, the peer-assisted learning strategies in reading, this tool in the classroom can promote literacy and learning and invites children to learn in a natural and enjoyable way (Flint, 2010). The PALS program has been shown to make several improvements. “PALS students improved more in reading, and their superior growth was not mediated by student type. That is, reading-disabled students, nondisabled low achievers, and average achievers in PALS classes outperformed their respective counterparts in no-PALS classrooms (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005).” This particular observation breaks through the stereotypical notion that only the high achievers can succeed. Not only are the students encouraged, engaged and enjoying reading, but this type of learning endeavor promotes other components of the learning process. Not only did the children in these studies successfully use talk and social interaction to collaborate with the text, but three distinct objectives were accomplished as well. The children were involved in using reading strategies to scaffold learning, they made connections to the text to construct meaning, and they used play as a type of social interaction and motivation (Flint, 2010). Whenever a teacher or instructor can accomplish so much by so little, that is seen as a very positive situation in every classroom.

Partnered reading becomes a tool in the hands of the teacher to promote learning and make it enjoyable simultaneously. Students are encouraged to work together to read an assigned text which promotes not only reading but the ability to work together (Gunther, 2001). Students are allowed to take turns reading and then offer feedback, which is a way to monitor the

comprehension of the reading (Ibid.). It also provides a model of fluent reading while at the same time helping students to learn decoding skills through positive feedback. At the same time, this type of student involvement allows the teacher the opportunity to circulate amongst the class, observe and offer individual remediation (Ibid.).

Methodology

Studying this topic for ourselves as researchers, we randomly selected students to participate. In our study we selected four students from a K-2 classroom. The student participation in this study included the following: three boys, one girl; two Hispanic, one Asian, and one Caucasian. The school chosen for this project was located in a small, southern township. The school was a private parochial school with multi-level classroom instruction. Permission was granted by the parents and students for their participation. The following protocol was followed in soliciting permission from the parents and addressing with the parents concerned content, confidentiality and permission.

The students were given opinion surveys and book comprehension surveys located in the appendix. In the opinion surveys, the students were asked three simple questions on whether they preferred reading with a partner or individually. The students were also asked questions after each book they read to test their comprehension skills. After answering some questions of this nature the findings were as follows. Three of the four participants ranked reading with a partner as more beneficial. The one child who preferred reading alone was ranked as a higher level student in all subject areas.

Limitations

Our study of this topic was small in comparison to the many other researchers interested in this topic. Our research deductions are based on the results of one small school sampling. We

only scratched the surface of possibilities. We were limited by the range of how far we were able to go with our research. Some of the limitations in our study have to do with demographics, availability, and time constraints. Each of which will be explained as follows.

Demographic limitations

The demographic limitations were identified in that the random sampling came from only one school in the localized area of the study. This would limit the amount of participants, ethnicity, wage scale, and limited religious diversity due to being from a parochial school.

Availability limitations

The availability limitations involve the researchers' opportunities to actually be in the classroom setting on a daily basis. Also, the number of enrollees subject to the random participation limits the basis of the findings to a small scale.

Time constraint limitations

The time constraint limitations come from the understanding that there were narrow time parameters for the researchers to be in the classroom. Also, all research and gathering of information had to meet fulfillment of the time demands on this paper.

Conclusions and Future Study

I believe from the study that there can be positive outcomes from both individual and partner reading. To give a child a love of reading, and a love of learning, is a teacher's main aim in awakening a curiosity for understanding (Hoyt, Mooney, & Parkes, 2003). In whatever technique is used, the only outcome that truly matters is that the student learns in the best way that is possible for them. Partner reading can be good for students in several ways. First, English Language Learners benefit when they are partnered with other students who can mentor them in reading. Second, partner reading is good for lower reading level students when they are partnered

with higher reading level students. In this way, lower level students can receive help from those more knowledgeable and in return higher level students can practice their reading and help their classmates. And finally, partner reading can be a fun way to encourage reading. Sometimes students are not interested in reading. Partner reading can provide students with a way to socially enjoy reading and make it seem more exciting. Partner reading can be useful for ELL and lower reading level students and helpful as a motivational reading tool as well.

On the other hand, individual reading can also be beneficial. For higher reading level students, reading by themselves can more useful, even preferable. "Research clearly shows the more you read the better you read (Trelease, 2001)." This being said, some students may prefer to read alone because they feel they can accomplish more on their own level. Another reason for individual reading versus partner reading is in the interest of focus. In our study, we sought to emphasize comprehension and focus. When students are partner reading, it can be hard to focus at times and hard to comprehend all the material. Those students reading individually may have these problems as well, but not as often. Individual reading can be valuable for high level students and can provide more focus and comprehension.

In the future, more studies will continue to evaluate and observe the level of improvement in the reading area. More long-term evaluation is needed, so that teachers can have what they need, or opportunities to try different methods in the classroom. In terms of the diversity in culture and academics in America, studies will continue to shed light on how students learn process and progress when it comes to the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic. Diversity in academic levels and culture will always be a factor, but perhaps as new learning techniques are tested and proven, the teachers can have at their disposal more tools to enhance the learning process.

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Appendix

Parental Permission for Children Participation in Research

Research Study Title: A Comparison of Individual and Partner Reading in a K-2 Classroom: An Emphasis on Comprehension and Focus.

Introduction

The purpose of this form is to provide you (as the parent/guardian of a prospective research study participant) information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to allow your child participate in this research study. Read the information below and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether or not to give your permission for your child to take part. If you decide to let your child be involved in this study, this form will be used to record your permission.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of our study is to determine whether individual or partner reading is more beneficial to your child. We will be emphasizing the areas of comprehension and focus.

What is my child going to be asked to do?

If you allow your child to participate in this study, they will be asked to:

1. Participate in observations
2. Answer simple comprehension questions after reading times
3. Complete an opinion survey on whether they prefer individual or partner reading
4. Possible recording of reading sessions

What are the possible benefits of this study?

The children will be learning in a more beneficial environment due to the results of this study.

Does my child have to participate?

No, your child's participation in this study is voluntary. Your child may decline to participate or to withdraw from participation at any time. Withdrawal or refusing to participate will not affect your child's standing in class. You can agree to allow your child to be in the study now and change your mind later.

Additionally, your child must agree to participate in the study. Your child may change their mind later if they no longer wish to be in the study.

How will your child's privacy and confidentiality be protected if s/he participates in this research study?

Your child's name will be changed in the research and your child's privacy and the confidentiality of his/her data will be protected. If audio/video recorded all data will be erased following the completion of the study. Any written data will be shredded after the completion of the study.

Whom to contact with questions about the study?

Prior, during, or after your participation you can contact the researchers, Cara Simonds and Cheyenne Meyerpeter, by sending an email to carasimonds@southern.edu or cheyennemeyerpeter@southern.edu for any questions.

Signature

You are making a decision about allowing your child to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to allow them to participate in the study. If you later decide that you wish to withdraw your permission for your child to participate in the study you may discontinue his or her participation at any time. You will be given a copy of this document.

_____ My child **MAY** be **audio and/or video** recorded.

_____ My child **MAY NOT** be **audio and/or video** recorded.

Printed Name of Child

Signature of Parent(s) or Legal Guardian

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date

Child Assent Form

I am a student at Southern Adventist University. I am doing a study to figure out whether individual or partner reading is more helpful to you. I want you to participate in the study because I want to see if I can make your reading time better.

For the study I may ask you some questions about how you feel about reading, and I may record your answers. After the study is done, I will destroy the recordings and no one will be able to see them. Only people working on the study will see them. I will not tell anyone about your answers to those questions. I will not show them to your teacher, your parents/guardians, or anyone else.

You should know that:

- You do not have to be in the study
- If you decide not to be in the study you will not be in any trouble with Lester Coon Adventist School, the principal, your teacher, your parents, or anyone else.
- You can stop being in the study at any time.
- Your parents have been asked if you can be in this study. Even if they say it is okay for you to be in the study, you do not have to be in it.
- You can ask me questions now and if you have questions later your parents can contact us at carasimonds@southern.edu or cheyennemeyerpeter@southern.edu.

Sign this form if:

- You understand what you will be doing in this study.
- Agree to be in the study.

Your Signature

Date

Researcher Signature Printed Name

Date

Opinion Survey

Student Name:

1. How do you feel about reading by yourself?

2. How do you feel about reading with a partner?

3. Which do you like better?

Student Name:

Name of Book:

1. What do you know about (name of topic)?

2. What is this book about?

3. Who are the characters in the book?