

Assessing Assessments:

How do first grade students perform on the Reading First assessments versus the Reading Results assessments? What do the results of these assessments tell about the reading program and the students involved? What are the implications of these differences for educational leaders in elementary schools?

By:

Delia Mosqueda
June 24, 2006

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ABSTRACT

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A thesis presented on the nature of progress first grade students at Maple Elementary School have made in two different reading assessments. The two reading assessments that are involved in this study are the Reading First assessments, which correlate with our language arts program Houghton Mifflin, and the Reading Results assessment, which was created by the California Reading and Literature Project (CRLP).

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the school year 2003-2004, the Tree House School District adopted the reading/language arts program, Houghton Mifflin. At that time, the elementary schools were using the Reading Results assessments, which were created by the California Reading and Literature Project (CRLP), to measure the growth that the students had made in the area of reading/language arts. These assessments, adopted by the Tree House School District, are to be administered to students three times a school year to help deliver instruction more effectively.

When the Federal government passed the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act in 2001, many schools in the Tree House School District became Program Improvement (PI) schools, according to their Academic Performance Index (API) and Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) scores. For this reason, all the PI schools within the district received the Reading First grant, which is a three year program coming from the Federal government. Kinder through 3rd grade classes were affected since Reading First applies only to those grades.

In the school year 2003-2004, Maple Elementary School used the Reading Results assessments school-wide to monitor the progress of the students in reading/language arts. In 2004-2005, the school implemented the Reading First assessments, which correlate with the Houghton Mifflin reading program, in grades K-3rd. Grades 4-6th continued to use the Reading Results assessments.

Statement of the problem

In the school year 2003-2004, Maple Elementary School was opened as a community school, and it has been the lowest, under-performing school in the Tree House School District. In 2003-2004, students were assessed with the Reading Results assessments, but because Maple is an under-performing school, it qualified to receive the Reading First grant for the 2004-2005

school year. In the first trimester of 2004-2005, all the teachers at Maple school, K-6 grades, used the Reading Results assessments, but by the second trimester, K-3rd grades were required to use the Reading First assessments, which correlate with the Houghton Mifflin reading/language arts program.

Reading Results is an assessment with multiple parts. If the students make progress, it will show throughout the school year, given that the same parts of the assessment are given to the students three times a year. The Reading First assessments are to be given to the students after certain themes have been taught.

This study will look at how five students in my first grade class perform on both assessments, Reading First and Reading Results. I want to know which assessment shows the most progress in the area of reading/language arts. I would also like to find out what the results of these assessments tell about the reading program and the students involved, as well as the interventions that the school will provide for the students who do not meet the benchmarks.

In this time of increased focus upon testing, it is important to look at the differences among tests so that educational leaders can help deliver instruction more effectively.

Research Questions

Which assessment, Reading Results or Reading First, is a better tool to show the progress that the students have made in reading/language arts? What type of intervention is going to be available for the students who do not perform at grade level? What do the results of these assessments tell about the reading program and the students involved? What are the implications of these differences for educational leaders in elementary schools?

Background

In the early 1990's, Maple Elementary School was closed as a community school, and the children who lived near-by had to attend other schools. For many years, Maple Elementary School served as an overflow school. In the school year 2002-2003, it served Newcomer students. In 2003-2004, it re-opened as a community school but continued to serve the overflow population.

Maple Elementary School is in a low socioeconomic community. More than 90% of the students are Hispanic with over 70% being classified as English Language Learners. More than 85% of the children receive free lunch and a big majority of the students are walkers. At the moment, Maple Elementary School has not met its API or AYP scores; therefore, it is considered a PI school according to the NCLB act of 2001. Parents are encouraged to take their children to other schools if they desire. Because of its PI status, it received the Reading First grant, affecting K-3rd grades.

Even though only the primary classes are required to administer the Reading First assessments, the entire school is using the Houghton Mifflin reading program, which is the district adopted language arts program since the school year 2003-2004. Teachers are required to have a Theme Wall or Focus Wall. The Theme/Focus Wall should represent the theme and week in the Houghton Mifflin reading program that is being taught. The upper grade teachers, who are using the Reading Results assessments, must also have a Theme/Focus Wall.

Setting

This research study involved one elementary school, Maple Elementary, in the Tree House Elementary School District. Maple Elementary School is in a low socioeconomic neighborhood with many of the parents working in the fields or factories. At the time of the

study, there were approximately 11 Bilingual classes, five Newcomer classes, two Special Day classes, and 17 English/Regular classes. Other staff members included the Principal, a Reading Specialist, a Speech Therapist, two Reading Intervention teachers, a Psychologist, a Reading Coach, a Counselor, an Outreach Specialist, and very few instructional assistants mostly working in the Special Day classes, the Kindergarten classes, and the Newcomer classes.

There were also push-in teachers working in certain grades. The term “push-in teacher” refers to an intervention teacher who may be working on a teaching credential. At Maple Elementary School, a push-in teacher is placed in a certain grade. For example, Mrs. X is the second grade intervention teacher. She serves all of the second grade classes and works with small groups of students who may be at-risk or below grade level. At the time of the study, first grade teachers did not receive assistance from a push-in teacher.

There was also an after school program that initiated in January 2005. At the start of the program, the at-risk students were the target group and tutoring and homework assistance was available. Because there was space available, students at grade level were also encouraged to attend.

Sample

This study was conducted in the school year 2004-2005. It includes five students in my first grade class. Two students above grade level were chosen to participate in this study, an average student, and two students who were not at grade level. The reason I chose these groups of students is because I want to see how the three groups perform on both assessments, and if the Reading First assessments are appropriate for students who are not performing at grade level.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Much research has been conducted in the area of reading instruction. In this literature review, I will discuss four factors that are important in delivering reading instruction more effectively. First, I will discuss what other researchers have found to be effective practices in reading instruction. Second, I will discuss the importance of assessment. Third, I will discuss reading intervention programs that other researchers believe have made a difference in other schools. Finally, I will discuss methods that help prevent reading problems.

Effective Practices

A lot of research has been done on effective practices in teaching reading to lower grade students. Many studies indicate that phonemic awareness, phonics instruction, vocabulary, fluency, and teaching comprehension skills are important in K-1st grades. Other studies also indicate that Direct Instruction is highly recommended, although it has been criticized for its tightly scripted lessons.

According to Debra Viadero (2002) Direct Instruction was developed by Sigfried Engelmann over 30 years ago, and it is widely used by thousands of schools nationwide. The term Direct Instruction refers to a rigorously developed, tightly scripted method of teaching that is fast-paced and provides constant interaction between the teacher and the students. It can be implemented in any school, regardless of the economic levels of the students.

Debra Viadero (2002) refers to other studies. She referred to Elizabeth Kemper from North Carolina State University, who did a study of six of the city's lowest-achieving schools. These schools began using Direct Instruction methods in the fall of 1996. She found that students who started using the method as early as kindergarten were reading on grade level by the end of 3rd grade, and students who started using the method in 2nd grade, were reading at

grade level by the end of 5th grade. Direct Instruction was used along with systematic phonics instruction.

In Houston, Direct Instruction was also used along with a program called Rodeo Institute for Teacher Excellence (RITE), with the district's most disadvantaged schools and it brought positive results. In Fort Worth, 61 schools also adopted Direct Instruction or Open Court, which is also a tightly scripted reading program, and these schools did much better on nationally norm reading tests than schools that did not adopt either program. (Dr. Bruce Murray (2004), a university professor and reading researcher at the university of Virginia, says phonemic awareness is a key indicator for successful reading. He studied both Open Court and Houghton Mifflin reading programs for the Superintendent of Norton City Schools in Norton, Virginia, Dr. John C. Sessoms. At the time of the study, both reading programs were candidates for adoption at Norton City Schools.

Dr. Bruce Murray (2004), who has no connection with either publisher, says that Open Court is a better language arts program than Houghton Mifflin. For example, he says that Open Court uses many more multiple activities to teach phonemic awareness than Houghton Mifflin. It also uses more flexible blending methods than Houghton Mifflin in the primary grades. In 2nd grade, Dr. Murray says that Open Court uses a fluency rate criterion with lots of listening opportunities with fluency models and assessments. Dr. Murray also says that Houghton Mifflin pays little attention to fluency in 2nd grade. In 4th grade, Open Court provides more instruction in summarization skills than Houghton Mifflin.)

At Maple Elementary School, we have adopted Direct Instruction as well as the Houghton Mifflin reading program. The first grade's reading program has daily phonemic awareness lessons, as well as phonics lessons, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension activities.

Scores have indicated that Direct Instruction, as well as other methods of instruction have been beneficial to the students.

Dr. R. Rosalie Jordan, David J. Kirk, and Kelly King (2005), say that phonemic awareness, phonics instruction, vocabulary, fluency, and teaching students comprehension skills are key elements to developing successful readers. Phonemic awareness is the ability to recognize and manipulate the individual sounds of spoken words. According to the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement, CIERA (National Institute for Literacy, 2003), children who have skills in phonemic awareness will have an easier time learning to read and write than students who lack these skills. Phonemic awareness skills can be shown in activities such as blending, segmenting, identifying initial, middle or ending sounds in words, rhyming, syllabication, intonation, and alliteration.

Phonics refers to the connection between written letters and the individual sounds of spoken words. Once children understand this connection, they will recognize words quickly and will be able to decode new words. Phonics instruction should begin in kindergarten and continue through the end of first grade.

Fluency is the bridge between word recognition and reading comprehension. It is also the ability to read text accurately. Students who are able to read accurately focus on the meaning of text rather than on decoding. Fluency develops over time and monitoring a student's progress is important for effective planning.

Vocabulary is the students' understanding of words and meanings. It is important for reading comprehension as it affects fluency. Comprehension is getting meaning from text. The content and structure of the text may affect comprehension. The purpose, prior knowledge, and a student's fluency may also affect comprehension. Therefore, it requires good thinking skills.

This literature relates to my own study since the first grade's Houghton Mifflin reading program has daily activities on phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, spelling, and fluency. The first grade's Reading First assessments also focus on spelling, vocabulary, and fluency. Scores have indicated that these relationships have been beneficial for the students.

Donald N. Langenberg (2000) wrote a paper about the National Reading Panel (NRP). According to Langenberg, the NRP says that in order for children to become good readers, they must develop phonemic awareness, phonics skills, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension skills. The NRP says that explicit instruction in phonemic awareness is beneficial from preschool. Phonics instruction also benefits K-6th grade students and students who are having difficulty how to read. Because not every child is at the same reading level and because there are different approaches to teaching phonics, the NRP says that teachers must be taught these different approaches.

Fluency is also important since it helps students understand text. Guided oral reading is important because students read to someone else who gives them feedback, which will eventually help them read more accurately and with ease. Reading silently to oneself also improves students' fluency, but the NRP also says that if silent reading is going to be included in the classroom, it should be combined with other reading methods.

Vocabulary benefits students' comprehension skills. Vocabulary can be taught directly or indirectly, but a combination of methods should be used. It is important that teachers are trained on how to teach specific comprehension strategies. As mentioned earlier, comprehension may be affected by the text's content, students' prior knowledge, and fluency to name a few, but teachers should be able to assist in recalling important information, questioning, and summarizing.

At Maple Elementary School, we are using Houghton Mifflin, and in first grade, the reading program has activities on all the five components, phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, spelling, and fluency. The Reading First assessments also focus on vocabulary, spelling, and fluency. Scores have indicated that these relationships have been beneficial for the students.

Bonita Grossen (1997) also found that phonemic awareness is very important for learning how to read. Grossen says that, “children who are not phonemically aware are not able to segment words and syllables into phonemes. Consequently, they do not develop the ability to decode single words accurately and fluently, an inability that is the distinguishing characteristic of persons with reading disabilities” (1997). Grossen also says that reading problems do not diminish over time, instead they continue into adulthood if early intervention is not provided. She says that 1 out of 5 children do not develop phonemic awareness skills, and throughout their school years, they fall further and further behind in all academic areas.

Bonita Grossen suggests that phonemic awareness should be taught using direct explicit instruction. Such activities should include rhyming, auditory discrimination of sounds, isolation, counting phonemes, blending, segmenting, deleting sounds from words, and word-to-word matching. The first grade’s reading program, Houghton Mifflin has daily activities on phonemic awareness. Most of the mentioned activities are taught throughout the school year progressing from easy to more difficult.

Grossen, Ball and Blachman (1991) did a study in which a class of kindergartners were taught, for 7 weeks explicit instruction in phonemic awareness and sound-spelling correspondences, and the children did much better than those who received instruction in sound-spelling correspondences without phonemic awareness. Another study Grossen used, Foorman

et al., also indicated that kindergarten and first grade students have done much better in sound-spelling correspondences when phonemic awareness instruction has been used concurrently.

Stanovich and Stanovich (1995), also cited by Grossen, say that prediction from context is not a useful strategy for word recognition because it delays reading acquisition. Instead, decodable texts should be used to practice sound-spelling relationships and interesting stories should be used to develop language comprehension.

In this study on two different reading assessments, I will study the degree in which the reading program, Houghton Mifflin, correlates with either assessment and to what degree it promotes effective practices for teaching reading.

Using Assessment to Support Instruction/Purposeful Assessment

Assessment is important as it supports instruction. Richard J. Stiggins (2002) says that there are two types of assessments: assessments *of* learning and assessments *for* learning. Components of assessments *of* learning are the standards, accountability, and assessments. They are the high-stakes standardized tests in which only some students achieve, but many others fail. Assessments *of* learning raise the bar. Stiggins says that politicians do not understand that not every student learns the same and that many students are intimidated by assessments. He believes that with assessments *of* learning, many students are left behind instead of leaving no child behind.

Assessments *for* learning serve to help students learn more. They are classroom assessments that teachers use to regroup the students. Students know what they are going to learn and be expected to learn before a lesson or a theme, as well as they know what to expect before assessment. Assessments *for* learning help teachers adjust instruction.

I consider the Reading Results assessment *for* learning as it has helped me identify the exact areas where the children continue to need support. The same parts of the assessment are given to the students three times a year making it familiar for the students, and the children are aware of the benchmarks. I consider the Reading First assessment *of* learning because a different assessment is given to the students after every two themes, each time becoming more difficult, although the scores have been very beneficial for the regrouping of my students.

Charlene Cobb (2003) says that assessment is a critical component of effective teaching and learning. She says that there should be a relationship between curriculum, assessment, and instruction. She says that through curriculum, teachers should guide all students to achieve high levels of content standards and benchmarks. Students should be given multiple opportunities to demonstrate learning through assessment, and instruction should be purposefully planned.

Cobb says that administrators and reading specialists should collaborate with teachers on assessments and use them to provide valuable information for developing alternative instruction or intervention. Cobb uses Guskey (2003) as a reference, who says that assessment should be useful for administrators, teachers, and students. Guskey (2003) says that teachers should tell students which concepts and skills are needed for achievement. There should be more than one opportunity to demonstrate success, and Corrective Instruction should also be part of assessment.

Guskey (2003) says administrators should plan for grade level meetings weekly to talk about assessment, as well as vertical meetings to share information. He also says that one common assessment with all students should be used so that administrators and teachers are able to work with that data.

At Maple Elementary School there is a strong relationship among our Houghton Mifflin reading program, the Reading First assessments and instruction. In first grade, after every two

themes of instruction in Houghton Mifflin, an assessment is given to the students. Corrective Instruction is also provided for the students who do not meet the benchmarks.

Elizabeth G. Shellard (2003) says that teaching reading is top priority in elementary schools. She says that classroom data and detailed analyses about the mastery of specific skills can be a powerful tool for improving instruction by helping teachers plan their instruction according to their students' needs. With assessment data, principals may be able to work with teachers to identify grade level skills students have not yet mastered. Elizabeth Shellard says that some schools and districts are developing their own mini-assessments that are parallel to state required assessments, which cover skills taught in 4-6 weeks. The need to develop these assessments has been important because sometimes state assessments are not available soon enough to provide intervention for students who are lacking certain skills. The Reading First assessments are given to the students every 4-6 weeks. They are aligned to the standards, as is the Houghton Mifflin reading program. These assessments have been helpful in that they have helped identify certain skills that the students continue to lack.

Elizabeth G. Shellard also used references from (Jandris 2001). Questions Jandris asks about assessments are:

- Is assessment embedded in instruction;
- Do assessments provide indication of learning;
- Do assessment include qualitative data, as well as quantitative measures; and
- Are students told the purpose of assessment and how it will be used?

Jandris (2001) believes that informal assessments as well as authentic assessments are also helpful in identifying students' needs and strengths. Jandris says that formal, standardized

measures are helpful because principals and teachers can address gaps due to race, gender, and socioeconomic levels. And data should be used to guide instruction.

Dennis Fox (2004) also believes that assessments should be used to guide instruction. He did a study on school principals who attended a 2-day institute where they learned about unit/thematic assessments given every 4-6 weeks. Like Jandris, Fox says that unit/thematic assessments should be used to help teachers adjust instruction according to the students' needs. He says that most of the time, scores are entered into a system where nobody pays attention to them and the class moves on regardless of the scores. Fox says that Corrective Instruction should be given to students who lack the skills to move on.

Dennis Fox refers to Thomas R. Guskey (2003) who says that Corrective Instruction should be followed by assessment. It is high-quality instruction designed to remedy whatever learning errors the assessment identified. It's not the same as re-teaching, instead, teachers must use instructional alternatives that extend and strengthen those skills in new ways. For those students who have minimal errors in assessment, Corrective Instruction should be enrichment of activities that will expand the students' learning. At Maple Elementary School, first grade assessments are administered after every two themes. Corrective Instruction is provided to the students who do not meet certain benchmarks. For students who meet the benchmarks, enrichment activities are provided to enhance their learning.

In this case, the 2-day institute provided for the principals useful information on how to use unit/thematic assessments to monitor student learning, distinguish effective teaching practices, and provide effective and timely intervention to students lacking reading skills. The unit/thematic assessments included reading comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, spelling, and language conventions. These are the eight strategies they learned:

- How to use unit/thematic assessment data to improve student achievement
- Make instructional decisions based on thematic assessment data
- Compare subtest scores within unit assessments
- Organize thematic assessment data in a user-friendly format
- Analyze unit assessment data in a series of simple steps
- Use outcome, demographic, and process data for instructional decision-making
- Facilitate discussion of thematic assessment data
- Provide teachers with a protocol for discussing unit assessments at grade-level meetings

Dennis Fox (2004) also says that thematic assessments provide vital information for teacher decision-making and principals can learn to use unit/thematic assessment data to help teachers in decision-making about instruction. At Maple Elementary School, assessment scores are entered in a database system. Our administrator and reading coach have helped teachers how to use these scores to guide instruction. We have also compared scores from previous assessments to the most recent assessment, and this has helped track the progress of the students.

High stakes tests are given to students in grades 3 through 8 to measure reading achievement. According to Peter Afflerback (2004), there hasn't been research that links increased testing with increased reading achievement. High stakes tests are limited in their ability to describe students' reading achievement because what they reflect is what students are able to do in a standardized test. They do not reflect a student's anxiety level, or prior knowledge and experiences children have had with testing.

According to Afflerback (2004), high stakes tests do more harm than good to some students because if they don't do well, they get labeled as "below average". For this reason, students may receive differentiated instruction and the expectations may be lower. High stakes

tests also confine and constrict the reading curriculum because it may be chosen for the fact that it is related to the form of the reading test. Testing may also alienate teachers because they may feel they have to teach to a test and not to their knowledge. All of these issues are involved in my study.

Testing is very expensive and it may disrupt high quality teaching because every hour that is devoted to test preparation means an hour taken away from instruction in reading.

Recommendations:

- Assessments should reflect performance over multiple time periods with various texts
- Assessment should measure a wide range of skills
- Assessment should follow clear guidelines for effective and ethical assessment practices
- Assessment should provide difference between acquisition or reading skills and the effective use of skills for various purposes
- Assessments should provide students with feedback about their performance with clear suggestions for improvements
- Assessments should provide teachers with useful information that can be linked to classroom instruction and should be aligned with classroom curriculum
- Assessment should also provide parents and administrators with useful information
- Assessment should be reviewed by the school board, administrators and teachers on a regular basis (Afflerback, 2004)

In this study on two different reading assessments I will examine the degree of which assessment provides more valuable information on the progress that the students have made in reading/language arts. I will also examine the degree to which the reading/language arts program is correlated to assessment and instruction.

Reading Intervention Programs

Reading is the cornerstone for all learning. When children learn to read, they increase their capacity to learn other subjects. On the other hand, children who fail to learn to read diminish their capacity to learn, are highly at-risk for school failure, and if intervention is not provided, they will lack the necessary skills for future employment.

“Direct Instruction” is one form of intervention because it provides constant interaction between the teacher and the students. “Corrective Instruction” is also another form of intervention since it extends and strengthens concepts in new ways for students who have not mastered certain concepts, according to assessment. For students who have mastered concepts well, “Corrective Instruction” should be enrichment of activities related to these concepts. Working with small groups of students, after-school tutoring, and assistance from instructional aides are also intervention strategies. But when all these methods of intervention fail, administrators must allocate resources to purchase intervention programs that will benefit the students.

John J. Pikulsi (1997) believes that reading difficulties can be prevented. In his article, “Preventing Reading Problems”, he describes five reading intervention programs (Success for All, the Winston-Salem Project, the Boulder Program, Reading Recovery, and Early Intervention in Reading) that have benefited students at all grades. These programs are in addition to the students’ regular language arts program. They are to be used with the lowest reading students and assessment is fundamental to determine progress.

All five programs acknowledge that small-group instruction or individual instruction will benefit students the most. Success for All has been implemented in nearly 100 schools. It has mainly served children from low socioeconomic backgrounds who have had few experiences

with literature. Major features of this program have included heterogeneous grouping, cross-grade grouping according to the students' level of reading, and one-on-one tutoring for students who have needed extra help.

The Winston-Salem Project included four major, thirty-minute blocks of activities to be reorganized around the first and second grade reading/language arts instruction time. These blocks of time included teacher-directed group reading activities, word learning activities, writing, and self-selected reading. Schools that served a high number of at-risk students had the opportunity to provide an additional 45 minute block of time.

The Boulder Program is an add on or pull out program that is added to whatever approach to language arts instruction is being used in the school. It is operated using resources from Title I and the ratio of teacher to students is fairly low. Six students work with one teacher at a time, daily, for 20 minutes. Supervised paraprofessionals also work with students at a ratio of three to one.

Reading Recovery is also an add on or pull out program that is also added to whatever approach to language arts instruction is being used in the school. It is exclusively a first grade, one-on-one tutoring program. Teachers who use this program are to be well trained and certified to use it.

The Early Intervention in Reading program, EIR, should be used for an extra 20 minutes, with five to six first grade students who are encountering difficulties in learning to read. According to Barbara Taylor (1995), the Early Intervention in Reading program is similar to Reading Recovery, except EIR is to be used by the classroom teacher. The children work on one story for three days. The first months of instruction, shortened versions of the actual stories are used; afterwards the longer versions are used. On the first day of instruction, the children write

words about the story to help develop their phonemic awareness. On days two and three, the children write sentences about the story with the help of the teacher. On the third day, running records are administered to assess student progress. Ninety-two percent accuracy is the goal and if a student is not successful with a story, then easier stories are chosen for that student.

Currently, we do not have any of these intervention programs at Maple Elementary School. We do have a computer program called Success Maker for all the students school wide. It has a math component and a language arts component. Each component lasts 15 minutes a session, and first grade teachers are encouraged to take their students to the computer lab two to three times a week. We also have a pull out program called Read Naturally. Read Naturally is composed of reading passages, and once a student has passed a reading passage, he/she can move on to the next passage. Currently, it is being used by the push in teachers with students from 3rd-6th grades. In this study of two different reading assessments I will study intervention methods that will be provided for our students who are not meeting the benchmarks.

Preventing Reading Problems

Reading problems can be prevented if identified early. Dr. Reid Lyon (2001) says that reading difficulties are more obvious among children who live in poverty. Reading difficulties cause students to feel less positive and to dislike school because they have difficulty learning other subjects. These students lack in vocabulary development, which would help them to understand the meaning of text. Students with reading difficulties are at-risk of dropping out of school, going to college, and having a meaningful employment. Dr. Lyon says that 50% of incarcerated people have reading difficulties, and 50% of children and adolescents who use drugs have reading difficulties, which is considered a public health problem. Unfortunately, 38% of

fourth graders nationwide cannot read at basic grade level, and in low-income districts that percentage rises to 70%.

Dr. Lyon (2001) also says that reading develops early in life with oral language and literacy interactions. Lyon says that children whose parents read to them before they enter formal school, have the advantage of being exposed to interesting texts, in which they have heard rhyming and alliteration. Their vocabulary, and general awareness of print and literacy concepts have started to develop. These students have great advantage over students who are not read to before entering school.

Children can overcome their reading difficulties only when identified early. If children are identified early, then Special Education may be beneficial. Dr. Reid Lyon suggests that programs that provide systematic and explicit instruction as well as Direct Instruction are more effective than those programs that are less explicit and less focused on reading skills.

Catherine E. Snow, Susan Burns, and Peg Griffin (1998) tell us that effective reading instruction requires that children use reading to obtain meaning from print. Children should have frequent and intensive opportunities to read, they should be exposed to frequent, regular sound-spelling relationships, learn about the nature of the alphabetic writing system, and understand the structure of spoken words. Adequate progress shows that children have an understanding of how sounds are represented alphabetically, fluency with different kinds of texts, vocabulary, comprehension, and continual interest and motivation. Obstacles in learning how to read are: understanding the alphabetic principle, failure to transfer comprehension skills of spoken to written language, and loss of motivation.

Maple Elementary School is considered a low socioeconomic school and most of our children do not attend a preschool program; therefore, being at a disadvantage of being exposed

to literacy at an early age. That puts teachers in a situation where intervention must be provided daily so students don't fall further behind.

Some recommendations for preventing reading failure are: beginning readers need explicit instruction in phonemic awareness as well as with sound-spelling correspondences, and independent reading at the child's comfortable level. Children who have started to read independently are encouraged to sound out unfamiliar words they encounter in meaningful texts. Assessment in fluency is highly recommended. Promoting comprehension is also important. Young children can summarize, predict, draw inferences, and answer questions about stories read to them. Writing is also important for learning to read. Very young children use invented spelling, which helps them develop the understanding of speech sounds and sound-spelling relationships. Young children should be encouraged to write studied words as well as word families.

Other recommendations are: high-quality instruction and updated curriculum materials, promoting literacy development in preschool and kindergarten, professional development for all involved in literacy instruction, and primary language instruction for non-English speakers. Explicit instruction for students in grades 1st-3rd and Special Education for students who need it.

At Maple Elementary School, many of these strategies are being used in first grade. Phonemic awareness and sound-spelling correspondences are taught daily. Fluency is assessed after every two themes in Houghton Mifflin have been taught, and regrouping of students is done according to assessment. The anthology books are used to help students enhance their comprehension skills. In this study of two different reading assessments I will examine the components to which our reading/language arts program prevents reading difficulties in children.

The literature that I reviewed provided valuable input for my study. I reviewed literature on the nature of effective practices to teaching reading, purposeful assessment, effective intervention programs and preventing reading problems. This literature will help me answer my own doubts as to what assessment, Reading Results or Reading First, is more effective in showing the progress that the students have made in reading, what do the results of these assessments tell about the reading program and the students involved, and what are the implications of these differences for educational leaders in elementary schools.

Chapter 3: Method

Measures

To measure which reading assessment demonstrates more progress that my first grade students have made in the area of reading/language arts, I used the Reading First assessments, which correlate with our language arts program Houghton Mifflin, and I also used the Reading Results assessment, which was created by the California Reading and Literature Project (CRLP).

I reviewed scores from five students in my own classroom. Two of the students were above grade level in the area of reading/language arts. One student was average. Sometimes he scored at grade level in some areas, but other times he scored below grade level in these same areas. Two students were below grade level. The reasons I chose these five students were because I had access to their scores for the entire 2004-2005 school year. I also wanted to find out if the Reading First assessments were appropriate for students who were below grade level since they were administered after certain themes in Houghton Mifflin had been taught. I was also curious to find out how each group of students scored on different reading assessments.

Instruments

In the following section, I will describe the Reading First and the Reading Results assessments in detail. I will also discuss the benchmarks that the students should have met in order to be at grade level.

Reading First assessments

Maple Elementary school implemented the Reading First assessments during the 2004-2005 school year. The primary grades' teachers assessed their students using the Reading Results assessments during the first trimester. K-3 grade teachers, bilingual and English classes, began using the Reading First assessments at the start of the second trimester. In my case study,

I reviewed scores from the 2004-2005 school year. The first Reading First assessment that I administered to my class was the themes 5 & 6 assessment. The first part of the assessment was spelling (ortografia). In this section, I said a word and then read a sentence using this word. The students were to choose the correct spelling word from three given choices. There were 10 items in this section. The second part of the assessment was words/vocabulary (palabras). The students were to look at a picture and also, from three given choices, they had to choose the best word that described the picture. There were three pictures and 10 questions. Another part of the assessment was reading the passages. There was a passage for theme 5 and another for theme 6. The students received one minute per passage. After each student read both passages, I averaged the scores and the students were expected to read 35 words per minute. The last part of this assessment was writing an expository essay about a favorite animal. In this writing sample, the students were to describe their favorite animal. They were given a prompt as to what they were expected to write. The highest score for the writing assessment was a four and a rubric was used to score the essays.

Themes 7 & 8 assessment was very similar to the themes 5 & 6 assessment, except the comprehension section was added. The students were to read a passage on their own and then answer 10 multiple choice questions about the passage. Assessments for theme 9 and theme 10 were similar to the previous assessment, except they were administered separately. Assessments for themes 1 & 2 and themes 3 & 4 were not administered to this group of students as the Reading Results assessments were administered during trimester 1.

The other assessments in Reading First are very similar to the themes 5 & 6 assessment. Themes 1 & 2, 3 & 4, and 5 & 6 assess fluency, spelling, words/vocabulary, and writing. The writing assessments for themes 1 & 2, 3 & 4, 7 & 8, and 9 are narrative. The writing

assessments for themes 5 & 6, and 10 are expository. The following table shows the benchmarks that the students should meet after each assessment is administered.

Reading First Table

Themes 1 & 2	Themes 3 & 4	Themes 5 & 6	Themes 7 & 8	Theme 9	Theme 10
Spelling: 6/10 Vocabulary: 6/10 Fluency: Practice Writing: 3/4	Spelling: 6/10 Vocabulary: 6/10 Fluency: 30 wpm Writing: 3/4	Spelling: 6/10 Vocabulary: 6/10 Fluency: 35 wpm Writing: 3/4	Spelling: 6/10 Vocabulary: 6/10 Fluency: 40 wpm Writing: 3/4 Comprehension: 6/10	Spelling: 6/10 Vocabulary: 6/10 Fluency: 55 wpm Writing: 3/4 Comprehension: 6/10	Spelling: 6/10 Vocabulary: 6/10 Fluency: 60 wpm Writing: 3/4 Comprehension: 6/10

Reading Results assessments

All of my students were assessed using the Reading First assessments, as required in the primary grades. I also assessed them using the Reading Results assessment. Because I administered the Reading Results assessment in Oct/Nov. 2004, using this data, I determined my three groups of students based on the results.

Reading Results was a lengthy assessment because most of it was administered one on one. The first part was blending. In this section, I said the sounds of a word, “f-l-o-r”. The student should have responded “flor”. There were 10 items on this section. The second part was segmenting where I said a word, “un”, and the student should have said, “u-n”. There were also 10 items on this section. The third part was the Basic Phonics Skills Test 1 (BPST 1) and it was composed of 85 words. It began with the sounds, then progressed to simple words, until it ended with the most complicated word, “carniceria”. Passage 1 was “Dondè Estàn” with only 36 words, and Passage 6 was “Un Viaje en Compania” with 259 words. All of these subtests were given one on one. The 25 spelling words were given whole group. In this section, I said each word and the students wrote them down. The first 8 words were very simple, CVCV, but then it progressed to more difficult words like “yunque” and “hierba”. In order for the students to have passed this part of the test, they were supposed to spell eight words correctly and get 40

orthographic features correct. The following table shows the end of the year benchmark for Reading Results.

Reading Results Table

Blending	Segmenting	Spelling	SpellingFeatures	BPST 1	Passage 6
9/10	9/10	8/25	40/58	75/85	60 WPM

Procedures

The Tree House School District uses a data system called OARS in which all the schools throughout the district store their data. I recorded my own data into the OARS system each time I administered an assessment. I administered the Reading Results assessment at the end of trimester 1 in Nov. 2004, as required by the school. This assessment helped me choose the five students that I used in my study. I only administered the Reading Results assessment to the five students that I used in my study at the end of trimester 2, in March 2005. I only administered the Reading Results assessment to the five students that I used in my study at the end of trimester 3, in July 2005.

The first Reading First assessment that I administered to all of my students was the themes 5 & 6 assessment in March 2005. Themes 7 & 8 assessment was administered to all the students as required by the school the first week of June 2005. The Theme 9 assessment was administered to all the students the first week of July 2005. Finally, Theme 10 assessment was administered to the students on the last week of school in July 2005. I downloaded the Reading Results and Reading First scores using my own username and password on the OARS system. I did not continue with my findings until I received IRB approval.

Implications

The results of my study will provide information on the nature of progress students have made in two different reading assessments, Reading Results and Reading First. I will also be able to determine if Reading First is appropriate for students who are below grade level, taking into consideration that they are administered after certain themes in Houghton Mifflin have been taught. With this information, I can provide valuable insight in regards to which assessment shows the most progress that the students have made in the area of reading/language arts. I hope that the information in this study will be valuable to administrators and school personnel and will benefit the students.

Chapter 4: Findings

The Students:

For my study, I analyzed the scores for Reading Results and Reading First assessments for five students who were in my first grade class in the school year 2004-2005. I will start this chapter by describing the students' educational backgrounds.

Student A entered Maple Elementary School in 2003-2004, towards the end of kindergarten coming from another state. She did not attend preschool and at the time of the study, she was English limited. Not only was she doing well in the area of reading/language arts, but she was also doing well in all academic areas. When she entered 2nd grade, in 2005-2006, she went into all English instruction, and according to her 2nd grade teacher, she is doing well. Her parents did not attend school in the U.S., yet they support her a lot, always attending all school activities.

Student B entered Maple Elementary School in the school year 2004-2005, coming from another school within the district. She did not attend preschool and at the time of the study, she was English limited. She was also performing well in all academic areas. Her support at home is very strong. She occasionally mentioned that her mother had her read before going to school and mother occasionally asked about her progress and behavior. Her parents did not attend school in the U.S.

Student C entered Maple Elementary School towards the end of the school year 2003-2004 coming from another school within the district. He did not attend preschool and at the time of the study, he was English limited. His strength was math. His mother attended conferences and Open House and made sure he completed his homework each night. His parents did not attend school in the U.S.

Student D entered Maple Elementary School in the school year 2003-2004. He did not attend preschool and at the time of the study, he was English proficient, although his parents did not attend school in the U.S. or spoke English. He is the youngest child in a family of five children. At the beginning of the school year 2004-2005, when Student D started in my 1st grade class, I referred him to our reading intervention teacher because scores indicated that he was below basic. He also had difficulty in math, and when he couldn't understand a concept, he became very frustrated, although he tried hard to do well. I also referred him to the Student Study Team (SST) where I was given a lot of strategies to help him. By the end of the school year, he had not meet all the 1st grade standards, but assessments indicated that he made progress in all academic areas. His parents were very supportive, and now that he is in 2nd grade, he has moved to another school district.

Student E entered Maple Elementary School in the school year 2003-2004. He did not attend preschool and at the time of the study, he was English proficient, although his parents did not attend school in the U.S. He is also the youngest child in his family. At the beginning of the school year 2004-2005, I referred him to our reading intervention teacher because scores indicated that he was below grade level in the area of reading/language arts. I also referred him to SST where I learned about strategies that would help him succeed. His strength was math and assessments also indicated that he made some progress in the area of reading/language arts. His mother was supportive.

Results:

The students' progress in both reading/language arts assessments, Reading Results and Reading First assessments, are discussed below. First, I will analyze how my five students performed on the Reading First assessments. I will start my discussion with Student A, who met or surpassed all the areas of the assessment and I will end my discussion with Student E, who did not meet all areas of the assessment. I will then analyze how my five students performed on the Reading Results assessments. Again, I will start my discussion with Student A, who met or surpassed most areas of the assessment and I will end my discussion with Student E, who did not meet all areas of the assessment.

Reading First Assessments

Student A:		Spelling	Vocabulary	Fluency	Writing	Comprehension
Themes 5 & 6	Passing Scores	6/10	6/10	35	3/4	X
	Student's Scores	10	10	99	4	X
Themes 7 & 8	Passing Scores	6/10	6/10	40	3/4	6/10
	Student's Scores	10	7	99.5	4	10
Theme 9	Passing Scores	6/10	6/10	55	3/4	6/10
	Student's Scores	10	10	96	4	10
Theme 10	Passing Scores	6/10	6/10	60	3/4	6/10
	Student's Scores	8	10	121	4	6

Student A surpassed all of the benchmarks scores each time she tested. For themes 5 & 6, she received perfect scores in the areas of spelling, vocabulary, and writing. She read 99 words on the fluency section. That is 64 more words than the benchmark score. Comprehension

wasn't assessed at this time. For themes 7 & 8, Student A received perfect scores in spelling, writing, and comprehension. She improved her fluency by .5 points. In the area of vocabulary, she dropped three points from the previous assessment, yet she scored one point higher than the benchmark score. For theme 9, Student A received perfect scores in spelling, vocabulary, writing, and comprehension. Her fluency dropped by 3 ½ points, yet she still read 41 more words than the benchmark score. On theme 10, Student A improved her fluency significantly, reading 121 words per minute.

Student B:		Spelling	Vocabulary	Fluency	Writing	Comprehension
Themes 5 & 6	Passing Scores	6/10	6/10	35	3/4	X
	Student's Scores	9	10	83.5	4	X
Themes 7 & 8	Passing Scores	6/10	6/10	40	3/4	6/10
	Student's Scores	9	8	78.5	4	9
Theme 9	Passing Scores	6/10	6/10	55	3/4	6/10
	Student's Scores	10	10	95.5	4	9
Theme 10	Passing Scores	6/10	6/10	60	3/4	6/10
	Student's Scores	7	10	88	3	8

Student B met all of the benchmark scores. In some sections, she had perfect scores. For themes 5 & 6, Student B received a perfect score in vocabulary and writing. She received a score of 9 in spelling and read 83.5 words per minute, 48.5 more words than the benchmark score. For themes 7 & 8, Student B surpassed all the benchmark scores, and this time her fluency improved to 78.5 words per minute. For theme 9, she received perfect scores on almost

all the sections of the assessment, except for comprehension. She scored a 9, that is, three points more than the benchmark score. She improved her fluency to 95.5 words per minute. For theme 10, although she didn't receive perfect scores, she met all of the benchmark scores. Although she surpassed the fluency score by 28 words having read 88 words per minute. She dropped her fluency rate as of theme 9.

Student C:		Spelling	Vocabulary	Fluency	Writing	Comprehension
Themes 5 & 6	Passing Scores	6/10	6/10	35	3/4	X
	Student's Scores	8	9	40.5	3	X
Themes 7 & 8	Passing Scores	6/10	6/10	40	3/4	6/10
	Student's Scores	9	8	43	4	10
Theme 9	Passing Scores	6/10	6/10	55	3/4	6/10
	Student's Scores	10	10	49.5	3	7
Theme 10	Passing Scores	6/10	6/10	60	3/4	6/10
	Student's Scores	8	9	49	4	3

Student C met all the benchmark scores for themes 5 & 6 and themes 7 & 8 assessments. For theme 9, he received perfect scores for spelling and vocabulary and met the benchmark scores for writing and comprehension. Although his fluency rate improved by 6.5 words as of themes 7 & 8, he did not meet the benchmark score for theme 9. For theme 10, he met the benchmark scores for spelling, vocabulary, and writing, but did not meet the fluency and comprehension sections. For comprehension, he received a low score of 3 points, and his fluency rate dropped $\frac{1}{2}$ point as of theme 9, that is, six words under the fluency benchmark.

Student C's scores show that fluency would be an area of focus as he did not meet the benchmark scores two consecutive times, rather the theme 10 assessment shows a decrease for fluency. The low score for comprehension on theme 10 may have been a result of his fluency rate.

Student D:		Spelling	Vocabulary	Fluency	Writing	Comprehension
Themes 5 & 6	Passing Scores	6/10	6/10	35	3/4	X
	Student's Scores	4	8	17.5	3	X
Themes 7 & 8	Passing Scores	6/10	6/10	40	3/4	6/10
	Student's Scores	8	9	27	2	4
Theme 9	Passing Scores	6/10	6/10	55	3/4	6/10
	Student's Scores	4	9	27	3	6
Theme 10	Passing Scores	6/10	6/10	60	3/4	6/10
	Student's Scores	7	5	34	3	2

Student D received significantly low scores in some areas of all the assessments. For example, on themes 5 & 6, he did not meet the benchmarks for spelling and fluency. For fluency, he scored $\frac{1}{2}$ below the benchmark. For themes 7 & 8, he did not meet the benchmarks for fluency, writing, and comprehension. Student D did not meet the benchmarks for spelling and fluency on theme 9, and on theme 10 he didn't meet the benchmarks for vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Although Student D did not meet the benchmarks for the fluency sections, he shows progress throughout the assessments. He improves by 50 % from themes 5 & 6 to theme 10.

The assessments show that fluency would be the focus for Student D. Although he scores low in other sections of the assessments, fluency is always consistent. By targeting fluency, comprehension may improve.

Student E:		Spelling	Vocabulary	Fluency	Writing	Comprehension
Themes 5 & 6	Passing Scores	6/10	6/10	35	3/4	X
	Student's Scores	8	7	12.5	3	X
Themes 7 & 8	Passing Scores	6/10	6/10	40	3/4	6/10
	Student's Scores	8	6	21.5	3	5
Theme 9	Passing Scores	6/10	6/10	55	3/4	6/10
	Student's Scores	5	10	27.5	3	6
Theme 10	Passing Scores	6/10	6/10	60	3/4	6/10
	Student's Scores	7	6	32	3	3

Student E's scores reveal that fluency would also be the focus. For the themes 5 & 6 assessments, he meets the benchmark for spelling, vocabulary, and writing, but scores more than 50% less on fluency. For themes 7 & 8, he meets the benchmark for spelling and vocabulary, but not for fluency and comprehension, although he improves his fluency rate by 9 words per minute since the previous assessments. For theme 9, he meets the benchmarks for vocabulary, writing, and comprehension, but not for spelling and fluency, although he improves his fluency rate by 6 words per minute since the previous assessments. For theme 10, he meets the benchmarks for spelling, vocabulary, and writing, but not for fluency or comprehension. Again,

his fluency rate improved by 5.5 words per minute as of theme 9; that is 23 words less than the benchmark.

Student E’s scores reveal that fluency should be the focus since it is always consistent. By working on fluency, his comprehension skills would improve because Student E would learn how to read more fluently.

Reading Results Assessments

The Reading Results assessments include blending, segmenting, BPST I, spelling and orthographic features, and a book passages. The same assessments are given to the students three times a year, and by the end of the school year, a student should receive a score of 9 in the blending and segmenting sections, 75 points in the BPST I, spell 8 words correctly and get 40 orthographic features correctly, and should be able to read from book 6.

Student A:	Blending	Segmenting	BPST I	Spelling	Orthographic Features	Book
Passing Scores	9/10	9/10	75/85	8/25	40/58	6
Trimester 1 Scores	10	10	85	18	49	3
Trimester 2 Scores	10	10	85	17	50	5
Trimester 3 Scores	10	10	85	17	48	6

Student A’s scores reveal that she always surpassed the benchmarks on most of the assessments. She always received perfect scores on the blending, segmenting, and BPST I sections. She always surpassed the benchmarks for spelling and its orthographic features,

although she dropped 1 point since trimester 1 on these sections. By the end of the school year, Student A met the fluency benchmark reading from book 6.

Student B:	Blending	Segmenting	BPST I	Spelling	Orthographic Features	Book
Passing Scores	9/10	9/10	75/85	8/25	40/58	6
Trimester 1 Scores	10	10	83	16	47	3
Trimester 2 Scores	10	10	85	18	51	5
Trimester 3 Scores	10	10	85	18	51	6

Student B's scores reveal that she received perfect scores for the blending, segmenting, and BPST I sections. She improved on the BPST I section since trimester 1. She also improved on the spelling and orthographic features, although she always surpassed the benchmarks. By the end of the school year, Student B met the fluency benchmark reading from book 6.

Student C:	Blending	Segmenting	BPST I	Spelling	Orthographic Features	Book
Passing Scores	9/10	9/10	75/85	8/25	40/58	6
Trimester 1 Scores	7	6	85	13	41	2
Trimester 2 Scores	8	9	85	16	49	3
Trimester 3 Scores	9	9	85	18	48	4

Student C shows improvement in all the sections of the Reading Results assessment. On the blending section, he always improves by one point meeting the benchmark by trimester 3. He meets the benchmark on segmenting by trimester 2 showing improvement. He always receives perfect scores on the BPST I section. He improves on the spelling section each time he tests, although he has surpassed the benchmark as of trimester 1. Even though he doesn't meet the fluency benchmark reading from book 4 by the end of the school year, he shows improvement from trimester 1 to trimester 3. Assessments reveal that the focus for Student C would be fluency.

Student D:	Blending	Segmenting	BPST II	Spelling	Orthographic Features	Book
Passing Scores	9/10	9/10	75/85	8/25	40/58	6
Trimester 1 Scores	9	8	65	8	32	1
Trimester 2 Scores	10	10	80	14	45	2
Trimester 3 Scores	10	10	85	14	47	3

Student D's scores reveal that by trimester 1, he had met the benchmark for the blending section. Although he received 8 points on the spelling section, he did not meet the benchmark for the orthographic features. By trimester 2, Student D had met the benchmark for most of the sections, except for fluency. Although, he did not meet the fluency section by trimester 3, scores reveal that he improved from trimester 1 to trimester 3. The assessments reveal that the focus for Student D would be fluency as he was only able to read from book 3 by the end of the school year.

Student E:	Blending	Segmenting	BPST I	Spelling	Orthographic Features	Book
Passing Scores	9/10	9/10	75/85	8/25	40/58	6
Trimester 1 Scores	9	8	74	9	30	1
Trimester 2 Scores	10	10	75	12	41	2
Trimester 3 Scores	10	10	81	15	43	2

Assessments scores reveal that Student E always shows improvement throughout the trimesters in all the sections. Scores also reveal that by the end of the school year, Student E meets the benchmark for blending, segmenting, spelling, and the orthographic features. Although he doesn't meet the benchmark for the BPST I section, he shows an improvement of 7 points from trimester 1 to trimester 3. From trimester 1 to trimester 2, Student E improves from book 1 to book 2. Student E does not show improvement in fluency from trimester 2 to trimester 3. These scores reveal that the focus for Student E should be fluency.

Summary of findings

In this section, I will choose two items that both assessments, Reading Results and Reading First have in common. I will then use the terms Much Growth, Some Growth, and Little Growth to show the growth that each student made in these areas.

	Reading First Fluency	Reading First Spelling	Reading Results Fluency	Reading Results Spell.
Student A	Much Growth	Much Growth	Much Growth	Much Growth
Student B	Much Growth	Much Growth	Much Growth	Much Growth
Student C	Much Growth	Much Growth	Some Growth	Much Growth
Student D	Some Growth	Little Growth	Little Growth	Much Growth
Student E	Some Growth	Some Growth	Little Growth	Much Growth

Student A and Student B demonstrated Much Growth on fluency and spelling in both assessments. In fact, both students surpassed the fluency benchmark for the Reading First assessments and the spelling section for the Reading Results assessments. Student C demonstrated Much Growth in the spelling sections of both assessments. Even though he did not meet the fluency benchmark for the Theme 10 Reading First assessment, he significantly improved his fluency as of the themes 5 & 6 assessment. He demonstrated Some Growth in the fluency section of the Reading Results assessments being that he did not meet the benchmark by 2 books.

Student D and Student E demonstrated similar growth in both assessments. Student D demonstrated Much Growth in the Reading Results spelling section, surpassing the benchmark. He demonstrated Some Growth in the Reading First fluency section, increasing the words per minute each time an assessment was administered. He demonstrated Little Growth in the Reading First spelling section scoring inconsistently and Little Growth in the Reading Results fluency section. Student E demonstrated Much Growth in the Reading Results spelling section, surpassing the benchmark. He also demonstrated Some Growth in the Reading First fluency section, increasing the words per minute each time an assessment was administered. He demonstrated Some Growth in the Reading First spelling section, having dropped his score on

theme 9, but increasing on theme 10. He demonstrated Little Growth in the Reading Results fluency section staying on book 2.

Surprising Findings

I was surprised when I analyzed the data. I expected to see more growth on the Reading Results assessment given that the same parts of the assessment are given to the students three times a year to demonstrate the progress that the students have made in reading/language arts. Given that the Reading First assessments are administered after certain themes have been taught, I wasn't expecting to see the scores of some children so high. Even though some students did not meet the benchmarks, they increased the words read per minute throughout the Reading First assessments.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Discussion

In this part of my study, I will discuss which assessment, Reading Results or Reading First, showed me the most progress that my students made in reading/language arts. I will also discuss the interventions that are provided for the students who do not meet the benchmarks. Finally I will discuss what the results of these assessments tell me about my reading program and the students involved, and the implications of these differences for educational leaders in elementary schools.

Reading Results or Reading First Assessments

The first conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that all the students demonstrated improvement from the beginning of the school year until the end of the school year in most parts of both assessments. But because all the parts of the Reading Results assessment are repetitive, except for the book passages, the students showed more improvement on this assessment, even though some students did not meet the benchmark for fluency. The Reading Results assessment also showed me a clearer understanding of the skills the students had mastered, given that all parts of the assessment start at an easier level and then progress to a more complex level.

Even though the students also demonstrated improvement on the Reading First assessments, which correlate with Houghton Mifflin, the students' scores varied from assessment to assessment. The variation of the scores was most notable in the areas of spelling, words/vocabulary, and comprehension. Each time the students tested, the assessments were more complex, given that the themes in the language arts program were becoming more complex. Most of the students, even though some did not meet the fluency benchmarks for any of the assessments, showed improvement from assessment to assessment.

Student A and Student B always met the benchmarks in all parts of the assessments. They always surpassed the fluency benchmarks. Student C met the benchmarks on most parts of the Reading First assessments. However, he did not meet the benchmark for fluency on theme 9, or the benchmarks for fluency and comprehension for theme 10. Student D and Student E had similar scores on the Reading Results assessments. Although Student D progressed to book 3 by trimester 3 while Student E did not progress beyond book 2. On the Reading First assessments, however, Student E met more benchmarks than Student D. Student D did not meet 2 or 3 benchmarks for each Reading First assessment, fluency always being consistent. Student E did not meet 1 or 2 benchmarks for each Reading First assessment, fluency always being consistent as well.

Houghton Mifflin

A second conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that in order for a school to receive the Reading First grant, it should use a scientific research and standards-based language arts program, as is Houghton Mifflin. In first grade, Houghton Mifflin teaches phonemic awareness every day, which is an important component of reading. The phonemic awareness section is very short, and it correlates with the phonics skill for that week. For example, if the students are learning to read and write closed syllables with consonant clusters, the phonemic awareness activity focuses on that skill as well. Houghton Mifflin also teaches phonics daily, concentrating on one or two skills a week. The spelling section correlates with the phonics lesson. The story for the week also correlates with the phonics lesson as well as other stories from “I Love Reading” and the “Phonics Library”.

The stories from the anthology help the students enrich their vocabulary and comprehension skills. Each week on Day 3 of the lesson planner, when a story from the

anthology is introduced, vocabulary words from the story are also introduced in the “prepare to read” section. On days 3 & 4, more vocabulary is introduced on the “Word Work” section of the weekly planner. The vocabulary words on this section also correlate with the story from the anthology, which makes the text more comprehensible. Each week a comprehension skill is also the focus for that week, and it is also introduced on days 3 & 4 to be worked on with the anthology story.

What interventions are provided for the students who don’t meet the benchmarks?

A third conclusion is that Maple Elementary School continues to have push-in teachers. They work with small groups of children who are having difficulty mastering a skill. The push-in teachers also tutor at-risk students after school, for an hour. Tutoring is provided for students in grades 2-6. Universal Access is also provided for the students who have not mastered a skill. After every assessment, teachers meet by grade level to discuss data. In first grade, teachers choose the strategic group, which is the group of students who are a few points from meeting the benchmarks, to give them extra support to help them meet next assessment’s benchmarks.

Teachers are also using Direct Instruction, which enables us to have constant interaction with the students. After we have reviewed the data from the theme assessments, we also provide Corrective Instruction for the students. The students who do not meet the benchmarks receive additional support in the areas that were not met. The students who meet or surpass the benchmarks receive enrichment activities to enhance their learning.

As of this school year, 2005-2006, the administrative personnel have purchased the computer software program, Success Maker. It has a language arts component and a math component. All the classes are encouraged to use the program. The lower grade teachers and students are encouraged to use the program for one hour a week and the upper grade students are

encouraged to use it two hours a week. At the moment, it is still early to discuss any advantages Success Maker will bring to the students at Maple Elementary School.

What are the implications of these differences for educational leaders in elementary schools?

Assessments are very important because they help educators deliver instruction. In order for a school to run effectively, administrators should take into consideration different assessment scores to create a vision and set goals as to what they wish to accomplish for the school. Without scores, nobody really knows the potential of each child.

As a future administrator, I would support an assessment that would tell me more about the strengths and weaknesses of the students to help serve them better. I would also support an assessment that correlates with our adopted language arts program because this would identify the areas in the program where the students are being successful or not successful. I felt that each assessment, Reading Results and Reading First, gave me important and valuable information about my students. For example, throughout my study, I found that the Reading Results assessment gave me more information about my students. In the Spelling section, for example, if a student misspelled the word “hierba” by writing “herba”, I noticed that this student had not mastered diphthongs therefore I would give her additional support in this area.

Reading Results does not correlate with the Houghton Mifflin language arts program. It’s important to say that the Reading First spelling sections are multiple-choice questions rather than writing. I believe that writing the words is a more effective method than having to choose from multiple answers because if a student is unsure on the spelling of a word, he has three choices and if she guesses and scores correctly I’m under the assumption that she knows how to spell that word.

The Reading First assessments also gave me important and valuable information about my students. For example, Student A and Student B always met or surpassed the benchmarks on all the assessments given. Student C always met the spelling, vocabulary, and writing benchmarks for all of the theme assessments. He improved his fluency throughout the assessments, although he did not meet the theme 9 or theme 10 fluency benchmarks as well as the comprehension benchmark for theme 10. It is evident that fluency is becoming more complex for Student C therefore it is important that we work on fluency in order for him to score better on comprehension. Student D and Student E had variations in the scores. Sometimes they met the benchmarks and sometimes they didn't. For example, fluency was an area where both students scored significantly low. Student D scored 34/60 words per minute and Student E scored 32/60 words per minute. Their inability to read at a faster rate may have affected other areas such as the spelling and vocabulary, which are multiple-choice. Continued support in fluency is important in order for these students to improve in the other areas of the Reading First assessments.

I also noticed that Student D and Student E almost always met the benchmarks for writing. Because they are not automatic spellers and rely on sounding out, this strategy may have been helpful for the writing assessment. I suspect that if the Reading First assessments did not have so many multiple-choice questions, it would be easier to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the students.

Administrators should also be educated in the language arts program and assessments that the district has implemented. They should also be familiar with each grade level standards to know the responsibilities of the students. When administrators are familiar with the reading program, assessments, and standards, they can better understand and serve the needs of the

teachers and the students. These needs include professional development for teachers and allocating resources to run programs that will be beneficial to all students.

As a future administrator, I would support a professional development program that enhances the language arts program by addressing the needs as well as the strengths of all the students. The Tree House School district has had workshops on Universal Access, which is extra support for students who have not mastered a certain task or skill. It is also necessary to support students like Student A and Student B so that they can be better prepared.

With this section, I end my study by mentioning that assessment is important in every grade level. Without assessment, nobody really knows the potential of each child. In my study, all of my students demonstrated growth in both assessments, Reading Results and Reading First. It is important to say that the Reading First assessments correlate with our language arts program, Houghton Mifflin, but the Reading Results assessment does not. Our next steps at Maple Elementary School is to continue using Houghton Mifflin in first grade, as it is our adopted language arts program and continue using the Reading First assessments as we will receive the Reading First grant next school year, 2006-2007. We will also continue using Direct Instruction, Corrective Instruction, Universal Access, as well as other interventions to support our students.

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