

Textbooks Across the Curriculum:

Can Struggling Readers Succeed?

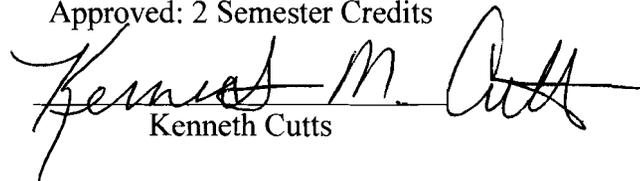
by

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kenneth M. Cutts", written over a horizontal line.

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ABSTRACT

Many children cannot comprehend their textbooks. This is a serious situation that challenges educators every day. If more students understand what they are reading, teachers can spend more time promoting higher thinking. This study addresses the problems struggling readers face when reading a content area, grade level textbook. The goal of this study was to evaluate whether one textbook will suit the needs of all students in one content area classroom.

A comprehensive literature review was conducted to examine reading comprehension and instruction for struggling readers. Struggling readers need to acquire and practice several strategies in order to decode and comprehend written text. In addition, educators need to diversify their instructional techniques in order help struggling readers succeed.

Results of the study regarding struggling reader's use of grade level textbooks and reading level texts were discussed. Participants were taught several reading strategies that may help them better understand text, as well as decipher unfamiliar vocabulary. In addition,

recommendations were made to assist instructors as to how they can best teach a variety of students with varying reading levels.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Many students perform low on standardized testing and cannot decode textbooks.

According to O'Sullivan, Lauko, Grigg, Qian, and Zhang (2003), only 32% of eighth grade students were able to score Proficient when reading science passages. This demonstrates that students need more instruction in reading comprehension and reading strategies. This is important, because as students get older, the material becomes increasingly difficult. Students who struggle to read textbooks are in danger of falling further and further behind. In addition, it is becoming common to have classes in which 75 to 80% of students cannot successfully comprehend textbooks (Carnine & Carnine, 2004). In short, do students understand what they are reading? Are textbooks unsuccessful in reaching struggling readers?

Struggling readers are evident at most grade levels. The most common issue for struggling readers is comprehension. Comprehension combines the use of background knowledge and vocabulary with strategies for constructing and monitoring meaning in a text. Most reading difficulties involve reading comprehension. Another reading issue involves the visualization and connection of sounds and letters. According to Leipzig (2001), a struggling reader may have difficulty with alphabets including phonemic awareness, knowledge of letter-sound relationships, and the ability to apply knowledge of sounds to decode unfamiliar words. Additionally, some readers may struggle with fluency which includes the speed and accuracy with which a student reads, and the expression and phrasing of their oral reading. Finally, another obstacle for struggling readers is lack of motivation. There may be not a strong interest or desire to read.

Research conducted by Greenleaf, Schoenbach, Cziko, and Mueller (2001) shows the majority of inexperienced readers need opportunities and instructional support to read many and

diverse types of texts in order to gain experience, build fluency, and develop a range as readers (as cited in National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), 2004). Additionally, discussion and language knowledge helps readers build confidence and comprehension in their reading. Without prior knowledge, reading strategies, and post-reading application, students can struggle with text comprehension. By learning strategies to aide comprehension, struggling readers can practice strategies until they become a skill (Temple, Ogle, Crawford, & Freppon, 2005).

Most studies show that struggling readers can overcome comprehension problems by practicing solid reading strategies. There are six strategies that appear in *Put Reading First* that have a firm scientific basis for improving text comprehension (Ambruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2003). By monitoring comprehension, using graphic organizers, answering questions, generating questions, recognizing story structure, and summarizing, students will be able to become comprehensive readers (Ambruster, et al., 2003). On the other hand, the International Reading Association's (IRA) position statement (1999) states that there is no "best way" to teach reading comprehension. A teacher can adjust the balance of methods so that each child is taught what he or she needs to learn.

By adhering to one set of teaching methods, teachers would be limiting students to a certain way of comprehending the text. Because there is no clearly documented best way to teach reading, educators who are familiar with a wide range of methodologies and who are closest to children must be the ones to make decisions about what instructional methods to use (IRA position statement, 1999).

Helping struggling readers interpret information in textbooks from classes across the curriculum is essential for success. Students who are able to decode the meaning in the textbook are able to apply it in real life situations. Without this crucial skill, students are not able to

connect the literary meaning with application. This study will find that textbook difficulty does impact reading comprehension, student motivation, and overall student achievement. Teachers can effectively help struggling readers succeed, and students will be able to use the skills indefinitely.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this research is to better understand the reading habits of struggling readers. This project will allow for observation of struggling readers and their successful comprehension using at-level textbooks in middle school classrooms across the curriculum. Information will be collected through direct observation in Language Arts, Earth Science, and Cultural Social Studies classrooms in the Iola-Scandinavia School District during the second semester of the 2007-2008 school year. Additionally, information gathered from a literature analysis will support the observation.

Research Questions

This study will include research of the following: What problems do struggling readers face when they are reading at-level content area textbooks? Additional research questions include: How does environment affect struggling readers and reading comprehension? In addition to visual representation, how does reading aloud affect struggling readers? Will lower level books help struggling readers decipher content more easily? Does a lower reading level of the textbook mean that the content is also simpler?

Definition of Terms

Struggling Reader. A reader who struggles with processing words with the degree of ease needed for reading comprehension

Reading Comprehension. Reading comprehension is the ability to understand the text as more than the sum of understanding the words. Some form of application is needed to fully comprehend a text.

Decoding. Decoding is the act of transforming written words into spoken words using phonics.

Alphabetics. Alphabetics is the understanding that spelling represents words by relating written letters to spoken phonemes.

Phonemic Awareness. Phonemic awareness is the ability for readers to look for matches between sounds and letters.

Miscue. Miscues are deviations from the printed text on a page.

Reading aloud. Reading aloud entails readers hearing the text as well as following along in the textbook.

Independent reading level. The readability or grade level of material that is easy to read fluently with few word attack problems and high comprehension.

Instructional reading level. The readability or grade level of materials that is challenging but not frustrating for the student to read successfully with normal classroom instruction and support.

Frustration reading level. The readability of grade level of materials that is too difficult to be read successfully by a student, even with normal classroom instruction and support.

Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

I assume that students will be motivated to read with proficient comprehension. I also assume that teachers and students will provide honest feedback during the duration of this research project.

Due to the nature of this study, the results will be general and not representative of the entire population. There is risk associated with researching a topic where I have direct contact with my students. The small size of the Iola-Scandinavia School District limits the end result of struggling readers and textbook comprehension.

Chapter II: Literature Review

There are many variables that need to be considered when teaching struggling readers: an understanding of reading comprehension, instructional strategies, and best practices to be used by struggling readers. There is no single ‘quick fix’ for students that have a difficult time understanding. Many factors need to be interwoven to form a complete understanding of the text on a page.

When understanding the wording on a page, students need to draw upon prior knowledge and experiences to be able to grasp the idea being conveyed in the sentence (Mitchell, 2006). For example, students reading about volcanoes in their science textbook may need to know special vocabulary before reading a selection on volcanic eruption. If they do not know what magma or lava is, the central concept of the effects of a volcanic eruption is lost. Some students can understand the vocabulary but cannot understand the concept or idea that is being conveyed. These students will need support in how to put ideas and concepts together to form an understanding of reading material. Support can come from teachers, tutors, family members, or peers. The support itself will vary according to the needs of the struggling reader. In many cases, reading aloud to the struggling reader will help because they do not have to concentrate on the written words. Instead, they can focus on meaning of the passage.

Reading Comprehension

Understanding a reading passage is not a matter of just memorizing the details of the author’s message. It is a combination of “Interpreting, evaluating, drawing on prior experience, and drawing on interactions with other readers and writers” (Temple, et al., 2005, p. 209). Children should internalize comprehension strategies and practice them. This is important because it helps children make what they are learning more meaningful.

Pressley and Afflerbach (1995) conducted a study on reading strategies that help struggling readers understand. The study involved 389 middle school students who spoke English as their first language. Extra assistance was given to the 7% of students who scored below the fiftieth percentile in reading comprehension. The researchers state that certain strategies help readers comprehend text. Engaging prior knowledge can help readers compare what they know about a topic to what they are learning. During reading, the reader can visualize details and events; students will be able “see” what is happening. Other strategies to consider during reading are vocabulary knowledge, asking questions and finding answers, and drawing inferences (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). By monitoring comprehension throughout, students can tell if the text is making sense. If it is not, they can reread a passage to find out why it did not make sense. Finally, observing the text's main ideas and summarizing them can help the reader remember and recall information from the reading.

Children need comprehension skills to retain and apply information they have learned. It is important to have these skills, so they can become independent thinkers. Teaching comprehension involves engaging students, activating prior learning, and applying new information (Temple et al., 2005). By comprehending information, students can internalize the process and practice when reading independently.

The ABC model was created by Vaughn and Estes (1986) to assist readers in understanding the words within a chapter or paragraph of a textbook. This model breaks down the students' thinking process into manageable pieces of information. It invites students to think about what they are reading and giving the reading passage a purpose. According to Vaughn and Estes (1986), there are three phases of the ABC model: Anticipation phase, phase of Building knowledge, and phase of Consolidation. In the anticipation phase, readers should think about

their prior knowledge. If they have no prior knowledge about a topic, the teacher should give background information and help students organize before reading. In the building knowledge phase, students need to reflect upon what they are reading and what is meaningful to them. They can question what the author of the text is saying. Finally, in the consolidation phase, students need to apply what they have learned and create examples from it.

Successful comprehension instruction is essential to future successes of students. The ABC model offers choices for guiding comprehension when teaching (Vaughn & Estes, 2005). Anticipation should come before reading, building knowledge comes during reading, and consolidation comes after reading. If students use a variety of comprehension strategies, their chances of success are much greater.

Instruction for Struggling Readers

Struggling readers can comprehend what they read with instructional support. It is important to make sure struggling readers understand how to use comprehension strategies (Coutant & Perchemlides, 2005). Readers of different levels can use the following strategies to increase comprehension: demonstration and immersion, attention to detail, guided practice, and application and extension. By using these strategies during reading activities, struggling readers can learn to apply prior knowledge and pick out important information within a passage. With additional support, it is possible for struggling readers to understand what they are reading.

Kameenui and Carnine (1998) suggest that teachers utilize additional steps to ensure reading comprehension. First, teachers need to make strategies explicit. Teachers need to model, use think-alouds, and give reminders to struggling readers to use comprehension strategies. Next, teachers need to supply scaffolding. Scaffolding is a support system in which a teacher models a strategy and gradually shifts the responsibility to the student. By using scaffolding, teachers

provide students with support that may be needed to understand what they are reading. When students connect ideas and provide background knowledge, they will be able to make sense of what is being read and connect it to their own life. Finally, teachers should review skills and ideas. This is important so struggling readers can see what skills and ideas they have learned.

In a study performed by Moats (1999), learning to read is a complex linguistic achievement. Reading requires children to recognize symbols (letters), recognize sounds represented by symbols, and apply what they see to what they know. For example, in the early stages of literacy, a child may be able to recognize the letters c, a, and t. It is when they put those letters together, sound out the word “cat,” and understand what a cat is that they can be literate. In later years, literacy involves more than recognizing sounds, letters, and words. It involves concepts and ideas beyond what is written on paper or spoken.

Some children learn about reading and writing before they enter kindergarten or before they even recognize their first letter (Temple et al., 2005). They learn that written symbols represent something greater. They can mimic written language, but they are not considered literate until they know what the written letters are representing. Spoken language is learned through exposure while reading is acquired through practice and education. Understanding written language and spoken language must be accomplished in order to read. If reading were to come naturally, many teachers would be out of work.

Learning to read is not “natural.” Reading takes years of practice and hard work. Effort and enjoyment are two factors that are essential to one’s literacy. Learning the relationship between spoken and written language along with early performance in reading can create successful readers. Enjoyment of reading, exposure to the language in books, and attainment of knowledge about the world are beneficial to early readers (Moats, 1999).

While students in elementary school are being introduced to reading skills and strategies, middle school readers need to refine and practice their reading skills and strategies. Students in the middle grades need to practice their reading skills because they are reading more content-related material (Carnine & Carnine, 2004). This can be difficult because the students now have several different teachers and each teacher has a different way of teaching. In addition, students have more responsibility. They are expected to read and learn from assigned materials, be organized and prepared, and make time for studying. It can be a very trying time for adolescents, but by continuing to teach reading skills, teachers can help alleviate some frustration.

There are several different aspects of reading that students are expected to know by middle school. However, there are also some skills that have not developed. Teaching reading in the middle grades is needed to correlate with the shift in the way students learn (Morrison, Bryan, & Chilcoat, 2002). For example, in middle school students begin to conduct research. They begin to engage in their own thinking in both real and important pursuits; applications of research and thinking abilities are made across the curriculum. Knowing how to conduct research is a skill that they need to continue to develop throughout their lives.

Reading strategies at the middle levels are extremely important to reflect upon. The reading strategies used in the middle grades are just as important as strategies used by beginning readers (Temple et al., 2005). If students are aware of a strategy that works particularly well, they need to recognize it and use it over and over again. By reflecting on these preferred strategies, fluent readers can read and comprehend complex materials.

In the beginning of the school year, an assessment of students' awareness of reading strategies should be conducted (Barlow, 2006). This assessment will provide opportunity for the students to see their strategies in action. By knowing what works for them, students can perform

conscious tasks to enhance their reading. For example, Glazer (2006) states that students can use Post-It® notes so they do not forget their thinking or strategies. In addition, students should write a reflection on what they did before reading, during reading, and after reading. If this is easily accomplished, students are aware of their reading strategies.

According to a study by Purcell-Gates, L'Allier, and Smith (1995), there are many reading activities that students can perform at home. Children can use instant messaging software, read emails, read an instruction manual, or even a recipe. These are things that can occur daily at home without even considering them a “reading activity.” Activities that involve conscious reading can include novels, homework tasks, and the newspaper. In any case, the home can be a source for many literary activities.

When a child is assigned a reading activity at home, considerations need to be given to the environment. Is a child supposed to read something out loud that he has not read before? If yes, then the reading material needs to be at his level – the independent level. If no, the material should be at the instructional level and practiced beforehand. When children struggle with reading aloud, it can potentially be a negative experience. A well-meaning parent can misunderstand the effort and criticize the child's reading or try to teach a phonics lesson (Temple et al., 2005). If the child is comfortable reading aloud and their motivation is high, they may be able to successfully read at a higher level.

There are many family literacy activities that can occur at home (Purcell-Gates, et al., 1995). Reading materials can take many forms such as magazines, websites, grocery lists, and religious books. It is important to focus on family literacy activities because it provides modeling for children. When adults read, it provides modeling for younger children. When reading occurs

as a family, it brings the feeling of cohesion and togetherness. Reading at home can also increase feelings of achievement, motivation, and accomplishment.

Benefits of Reading Aloud

Reading aloud to children helps develop and improve literacy skills. Children tend to listen on a higher level than they read; listening to other readers stimulates growth and understanding of vocabulary and language patterns (Guignon, 2002). There are many benefits to reading aloud to students. It expands their vocabulary, develops their ability to understand the written language, it encourages enthusiasm for literacy, and makes them aware of the structure of the text (Beck & McKeown, 2001).

Reading aloud is important because it benefits children's growth as readers and learners. It also helps children develop important language skills that will help them learn to read on their own. Immersing children in various types of literature helps them understand the critical features of written language and the varying structures of different genres. When this exposure is accompanied by supportive and relaxed discussions, children are able to extend their worldview, and develop important critical thinking skills. In addition to giving children educational skills, reading aloud can also give children self-esteem and security. If someone takes the time to read to them, they feel important.

Vocabulary and Struggling Readers

There are several levels of vocabulary knowledge. Each level builds upon another for word comprehension. According to research provided by Ambruster et al. (2003), there are four types of vocabulary: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Oral vocabulary consists of listening and speaking while reading vocabulary consists of words in print. A student may have used a word in conversation before, but may not know how to use it in a writing context.

According to Ambruster et al. (2003), there are two ways to learn vocabulary: directly and indirectly. Most words are learned through everyday experiences with oral and written language. Indirect vocabulary knowledge can result from engaging in oral language, listening to read-alouds, and reading extensively by oneself. Direct vocabulary knowledge results from specific word instruction using effective vocabulary strategies such as dictionary use, word parts including root words, and contextual meaning of words.

By understanding vocabulary, struggling readers can focus less on the meaning of each word and concentrate more on the meaning of the reading passage. It is important to have a vast vocabulary in order to successfully understand the concept the author is trying to express.

Comparative Data

A study performed by Bullard, Graffis, and Hamp (2002) shows that students' learning styles and their engagement in reading were large factors in reading comprehension. Motivated students in three separate classrooms were given an equal amount of instruction to vocabulary, comprehension skills, fluency, and writing. Lessons were taught using diverse activities. This helped keep motivation levels high. The students who did not receive additional instruction and who were less motivated had lower reading scores on standardized tests. Students' engagement in reading in conjunction with instructional methods used by teachers had a direct impact on struggling readers.

A study performed by Lubliner (2002), described the importance of clarification. There are many vocabulary words that are unknown to struggling readers. Once difficult words are clarified, students can better understand the overall meaning of a passage. When compared to other reading strategies, clarifying vocabulary significantly increased reading comprehension. Not only does clarifying help the struggling reader, it also is important for the teacher to know

where students are struggling. Clarification of vocabulary or class-specific jargon should be part of instructional best practices (Bafumo, 2006).

This research project will observe motivational factors as well as instructional techniques in connection with a student's text comprehension. Reading at-level textbooks across the curriculum can be a challenge for some struggling readers. Motivation is a key element in successfully understanding sentences, paragraphs, chapters, or an entire book. Can struggling readers successfully comprehend using at-level textbooks in classrooms across the curriculum? Is motivation a key element in understanding? Will diverse instructional techniques increase comprehension levels? This study will report the findings on how motivation and vocabulary awareness affect reading comprehension.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

This research project will analyze struggling readers and their reading habits. Reading comprehension is essential in today's society, so understanding why students read poorly is the first step in acknowledging change. This chapter will explain how participants were selected, where participants will be observed, what instrumentation will be used to gather data, analysis of data, and limitations of the study.

Selection and Description of Sample

The population of this study will be sixth or seventh grade students who score two standard deviations below the mean on reading portion of the Measure of Academic Progress test (also known as MAPS test) during the spring and fall of 2007 at Iola-Scandinavia Middle School. During spring 2007, students will take the MAPS test as a sixth grade student and during fall 2007 students will take the MAPS test as a seventh grade student.

Students who score significantly lower than their peers on the reading portion of the MAPS test will be chosen to participate in this study. Iola-Scandinavia Middle School students who take the test in the spring of their sixth grade year and the fall of their seventh grade year and score two standard deviations below the mean both times are eligible to participate. In choosing students who scored two standard deviations below the mean both times, it reduces the risk of choosing a student who had a poor test-taking day or a negative attitude.

The participants chosen for this study would be recognized as a valid sample because data will be used from two school years. Students who score two standard deviations lower than the mean only once out of the two tests are not eligible for this study.

Instrumentation

For this study, scores from the reading portion of the MAPS test will be used. The MAPS test is designed to assess academic skills in order to improve the quality of instruction. It focuses on education skills instead of knowledge learned in general education courses. The questions become easier or more difficult based on the number of correct or incorrect answers.

In addition to the MAPS test results, the researcher will observe the reading habits (Appendix A) of the students in different content areas (science, social studies, and language arts) as well as the participants' attitudes about reading (Appendix B).

The informal reading inventory (Appendix A) is designed to show the students' strengths and weaknesses in the following areas: word recognition, word meaning, reading strategies, and reading comprehension. This inventory will be used during two observations of each participant. When observing the student for the first time, the observer will use a pre-determined reading passage within a content area textbook. The pre-determined portion of the text will be selected prior to the first observation which allows the observer to prepare implicit and explicit comprehension questions. While the student is reading, the observer will record tally marks when the student makes an error in word recognition. After the student has finished reading, the observer will ask the student comprehension and vocabulary questions, as well as discuss reading strategies used. During the second observation, a level appropriate reading passage will be used. The main ideas will be similar to the first reading passage and similar implicit and explicit comprehension questions will be posed. The second observation will be two weeks after the first observation. The observer will again record tally marks when an error is made by the student. The data from the two readings would be compared and analyzed to see if a lower reading level

helps struggling readers decipher content more easily. The informal reading inventory was designed based on experience in a middle school language arts classroom.

The attitudinal survey (Appendix B) is designed to determine attitude and confidence levels among struggling readers. This survey would be administered to all Iola- Scandinavia Middle School students 30 minutes before they take the reading portion of the MAPS test and administered only to the participants at the end of the study. This ensures that no matter who falls two standard deviations below the mean, they will have taken the attitudinal survey before the first of the two MAPS tests. The surveys of project participants will be compared to see if the participant's attitude improved during the research project. The attitudinal surveys will be administered approximately six months apart. The survey was designed based on experience with middle school language arts students.

Data Collection

Data for this project will be collected by distributing an attitudinal survey to students that are chosen to be a participant (Appendix B). The survey involves the students' attitudes about reading and is to be distributed before taking each of the two MAPS reading. The data regarding attitudes toward reading will be compared.

Another method of data collection involves observation of each student while each student reads a text passage aloud. Using the informal reading inventory (Appendix B), data in four categories will be recorded. An informal reading inventory will determine if the textbooks being used in each content area is appropriate for low ability readers. This data will support the hypothesis that content area teachers need an array of texts in several different reading levels.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the data collected through the informal reading inventory (Appendix A) will determine where students are struggling when reading an at-level textbook. If most of the students are struggling with vocabulary, chances are they will also struggle with comprehension; however if lower level textbooks cover the same premises, lower ability students may be able to understand the vocabulary thus increasing reading comprehension.

Analysis of the data collected through the attitudinal survey (Appendix B) will determine if students need greater motivation and encouragement while reading difficult text passages. The attitudinal survey is a Likert scale, so the data gathered will be scored according to question type. If a statement is positively worded, the scoring is as follows: Strongly Agree = +2, Agree = +1, Disagree = -1, Strongly Disagree = -2. If a statement is negatively worded, the scoring is as follows: Strongly Agree = -2, Agree = -1, Disagree = +1, Strongly Disagree = +2. The closer the scores are to 28 points, the better the attitude is toward reading. The closer the scores are to -28 points, the worse the attitude is toward reading.

Limitations

The instruments to be used in this study were created for the purpose of this study. There are no existing measures of reliability or validity. The data to be collected is limited to the students at Iola-Scandinavia School District during the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 school years. The students who qualify to participate in this study will be chosen based on their MAPS reading test results. This may eliminate students who have low reading ability, but were not a student in the Iola-Scandinavia School District for the required timeframe. Due to the nature of this study, the results are general and not representative of the entire population.

Chapter IV: Results

Many teachers are faced with a diverse classroom full of students. In one classroom, some students may be gifted and read two or more levels higher than their current grade level while others may read two or more levels lower than their current grade level. This means that there may be a minimum range of four years between accelerated students and struggling readers. How does a teacher cope when one textbook will not suit all readers?

This study focused on struggling readers and textbook readability. Students observed as part of this study demonstrated a need for alternative reading materials in content area classes. Observation of a select group of struggling readers proved that textual materials at reading level are essential for success.

There were six students qualified to be part of this study: four males and two females. One male student did not obtain parental permission to be included in the study and one male student transferred to another school after MAPS testing but before observation began. The four remaining students successfully participated as subjects in this study.

This study was conducted by delivering an attitudinal survey (Appendix B) to all sixth grade students before taking the MAPS test in the spring of 2006 and again to study participants at the conclusion of the study. Additionally, an informal reading inventory (Appendix A) was taken while participants read a grade level content area reading passage and again while reading a similar passage at their own reading level.

What problems do struggling readers face when they are reading at level content area textbooks?

Participants disclosed their struggle to comprehend content area textbooks. They feel that what they are reading is important, however, they are not confident that they will understand it.

Three participants stated that they feel dumb when their teacher asks them a question about what they read in their textbook. They concluded that they would rather have small group discussions or a summarization by their teacher before being asked any comprehension questions.

Participants' attitudes toward the teacher were negative if the teacher did not make accommodations for their reading hardship. After the study, participants became more positive due to the repertoire of strategies learned.

The IRI showed that reading miscues were frequent and affected the participant's understanding of the passage. Comprehension was at the frustration level even when look backs were offered. Students gave up easily during the first reading.

How does environment affect struggling readers and reading comprehension?

Information gathered on the attitudinal survey showed that the participants lack concentration when reading. All four of the participants understand that reading is essential to succeed as a student, but they have trouble learning how to comprehend what they are trying to read. During this study, strategies to improve comprehension were introduced and applied by the participants. Location and distractions were discussed during the discussion on strategies to improve comprehension. Three out of four participants noted an improvement in concentration which in turn improved comprehension.

In addition to visual representation, how does reading aloud affect struggling readers?

When asked if participants dislike reading aloud in class, three out of four responded that they agree. They feel that concentration is placed on reading accurately and well instead of the information that was being read. They also stated that their history and science teachers use the 'read aloud' technique often in their classes.

On the other hand, all participants enjoy being read to. They feel that emphasis is taken off of their oral reading capabilities and placed on understanding what the text is trying to say.

Will lower level books help struggling readers decipher content more easily?

During this study, books at the participants' level helped them better understand content. They were first tested using a passage from their ninth grade science textbook. Comprehension was 20% for female one, 35% for female two, 15% for male one, and 40% for male two. Implicit and explicit questions were used to determine comprehension. Look backs were allowed.

The second reading passage was at each participant's respective reading level. Each person showed a marked improvement. Comprehension was 60% for female one, 95% for female two, 75% for male one, and 100% for male two.

Does a lower reading level of the textbook mean that the content is also simpler?

The two reading passages delivered in this study were similar on content using lower reading levels. Comprehension questions were the same the at grade level and at reading level reading passages. This demonstrates that it is possible to have a lower level textbook with the same level of content.

Chapter V: Discussion

Many teachers are burdened with how to help their students better understand material presented in class. Whether students are visual, auditory, or kinesthetic learners, the overall objective remains the same: to understand and apply the content of a lesson. This study questioned the use of a 'one-size-fits-all' text for content area classes at Iola-Scandinavia Middle School.

This purpose of this study was to identify ways that struggling readers can succeed in a content area classroom. The outcome demonstrated that learning objectives in content area classrooms are not compromised when struggling readers use a text that is at their reading level.

Limitations

Due to the nature of this study, the results are general and not representative of the entire population. There is risk associated with researching a topic where I have direct contact with my students. The small size of the Iola-Scandinavia School District limits the end result of struggling readers and textbook comprehension

Conclusions

Struggling readers who are given reading level appropriate reading materials in content area classes are more likely to engage in reading without apprehension and comprehension difficulties. Students who struggle with reading often have an "I can't" attitude before they even try. When teachers are honest and accommodating with struggling readers, the "I can't" attitude becomes less negative. The struggling readers also become more receptive to new strategies that may aid their comprehension and vocabulary skills.

According to information gathered in this study, struggling readers' attitudes improve when they are working on content related material that is presented at their reading level. By

discussing objectives and strategies before reading, students improved their desire to succeed as well as their comprehension. There is a correlation between attitude and reading comprehension. There was little difference in attitudes between male and female participants.

Recommendations

Content area teachers need to be careful when assigning a reading passage out of a grade level textbook. Many teachers do not take into consideration that many struggling readers will not understand what they are reading. A remedy to this situation is to provide alternatives to the textbook. If teachers can find alternative reading materials, appropriate to reading level, struggling readers can succeed. Many times the central concept of a grade level reading passage can be demonstrated in simplified language. This will allow struggling readers to understand the concepts as well as gain confidence in their reading abilities.

Many content teachers are now using textbooks as a supplemental activity in their curriculum. In the past, textbooks were the foundation of content area lessons; however they are rapidly becoming a secondary factor in classrooms. Teachers with ten or more teaching years at Iola-Scandinavia School District are generally moving away from one set of textbooks for the entire class. They say that the availability of information via the Internet is one factor in not using textbooks as the only reading material. When asked about struggling readers and the use of one-size-fits-all texts, they say that it makes sense to provide an array of reading materials to aid comprehension as well.

Appendix A

Participant's Name:		Observer's Name:		
	Word Recognition (Tally mark for each error)	Reading Strategies (Write observation of reading strategies used)	Reading Comprehension Questions (Implicit)	Reading Comprehension Questions (Explicit)
Reading passage one (first observation)				
Reading passage two (second observation)				

Appendix B

Participant's Name:				
I am feeling confident while I read a book of my own choice.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I am able to concentrate when I read.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I feel positive when I can read a book of my own choice during school in my free time.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I feel nervous when I read a selection out of a textbook.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Reading is a waste of time.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My mood affects my understanding of what I read.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Where I read is important to my understanding of what I read.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I feel confident when I am asked to read something out of my science textbook.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I feel dumb when the teacher asks me questions about what I read in my textbook.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My feelings about my teacher affect how well I read.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I don't like to read aloud in class.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I like being read to.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I don't like to take a reading test.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Reading is important to learning.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

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