

Dissertation Review: *Targeted Instruction for Struggling Readers: It Takes a Team*

Citation

Richburg-Burgess, J. (2012). *Targeted instruction for struggling readers: It takes a team* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3530073)

Introduction

Richburg-Burgess (2012) “investigated and documented the implementation of this new model which was designed for second and third grade struggling readers with assessed needs in decoding and fluency” (p. vi). A large part of this implementation was the creation of a professional learning community (PLC) intervention team. The other part was the intervention instruction that included explicit phonics instruction, sight word development, and fluency instruction during a 30 minute a day intervention period.

The intervention instruction included explicit phonics instruction using Benchmark Education’s *Build Up* and *Spiral Up Phonetic Connections* as well as Benchmark Education’s *Reader’s Theater* for fluency and comprehension. These two programs were used in a seven-week cycle, with the *Phonetic Connections* being taught five days a week for 30 minutes a day for six weeks and the *Reader’s Theater* used on the seventh as a fluency activity. Other independent reading activities were part of the implementation that occurred outside the intervention period.

Results

Assessments used to qualify students for the intervention and monitor progress over time included the DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency Assessment and the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). Of the original 34 students in 2nd and 3rd grade who qualified for the program, 28 students completed the program. Of the 28 students, 15 were in 2nd grade and 13 were in 3rd grade. Twenty-seven of the students were African American and one was Latino.

Richburg-Burgess stated “results revealed that [DIBELS] posttest scores ($M=67.10$, $SD=18.97$) were significantly higher than [DIBELS] pretest scores ($M=37.53$, $SD=9.93$) for students in the program ($t(27) = 10.98$, $p < .001$)” (p. 106). Additionally, 35 percent of the participants achieved the goal of gaining at least 36 to 38 words correct per minute on the DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency Assessment.

Students, according to Richburg-Burgess, also made progress by “increasing their instructional reading level as indicated by the DRA results and the grade equivalent level” (p. 117). Eighty-seven percent of 2nd graders met the goal of moving at least one grade level in reading and 62 percent of 3rd graders moved at least one grade level in reading.

Surveys of the members of the PLC and of students was also undertaken by Richburg-Burgess. Of particular interest were students’ responses to the *Phonetic Connections* instruction and the *Reader’s Theater*. Students almost unanimously indicated they wanted to continue the Cupcake Reader’s Theater. It was called Cupcake Reader’s Theater because student received cupcakes and a beverage after the

performances. Students liked the stories, the opportunity to participate, and the opportunity to perform and watch performances.

Regarding the small group instruction, 75 percent of the students indicated they liked small group instruction. There was a favorable reaction to the materials used in small group by 70 percent of students. The building words activity with manipulatives was enjoyed by 68 percent of students. Overall, Richburg-Burgess states, “the students rated their small group targeted instruction sessions as a positive experience with which they wanted to continue to be a part of for the next year” (p. 118).

Summary

This study combined the use of a PLC Intervention Team with targeted instruction using *Phonetic Connections* and *Reader’s Theater* in a seven-week cycle across the school year. Both parts of this study were necessary for the progress of the students in the study. Richburg-Burgess presents a compelling story for establishing a successful program to help struggling students.