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MEASURING THE EFFECTS OF GUIDED READING ON NeSA-R STUDENT

COHORT SCALE SCORES

By

Todd Tripple

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College of the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Education

Major: Educational Administration

Under the Supervision of Dr. Peter J. Smith

Omaha, Nebraska

February, 2015

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Abstract

MEASURING THE EFFECTS OF GUIDED READING ON NeSA-R STUDENT COHORT SCORES

Todd E. Tripple

University of Nebraska, 2015

Advisor: Dr. Peter J. Smith

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the effects of new district Guided Reading protocols on elementary students' reading proficiency as measured by the Nebraska State Accountability-Reading (NeSA-R) student cohort scores from 2013 to 2014. The implementation of the new Guided Reading protocols in the research district provided clear guidance on the instruction of Guided Reading. The protocols were based on the research and recommendations of Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell, "Fountas & Pinnell."

Prior to the implementation of the new Guided Reading protocols, Guided Reading was a suggested, but not a required, instructional practice in the research district. The new protocols established the essential components of Guided Reading for the research district: small-group instruction, appropriate instructional level text, flexible grouping, and progress monitoring. The essential Guided Reading components were coupled with professional development supporting the role of the teacher in Guided Reading. This study analyzed mean scale scores of three cohorts of students and one All Cohort group in all of the research district's fifteen elementary schools. The study found statistically significant effects upon student performance on the NeSA-R after the implementation of new district Guided Reading protocols of

three of the four test groups. Whereas this study denotes statistically significant effects upon student reading performance on the NeSA-R after the implementation of the new district Guided Reading protocols, the study suggests a need for additional research.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

“Reading is the process of understanding the written language. It begins with a flutter of patterns on the retina and ends (when successful) with a definite idea about the author’s intended message. Thus, reading is at once a “perceptual” and “cognitive” process (Rumelhart, 1994). Given the complexity of this process, the importance of defining effective literacy instruction is undeniable. A universal need exists for quality reading instruction aimed at developing a student’s understanding of the written language.

Data from the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) indicates inadequate performance in reading nationwide. “The NAEP Reading Assessment measures the reading and comprehension skills of students in grades 4, 8, and 12 by asking them to read selected grade-appropriate paragraphs and answer questions based on what they have read” (nces.ed.gov). In 2013, nationwide reading performance on the NAEP revealed only 34% of students in grade 4 were proficient or advanced. A staggering 66% of students in grade 4 were below the standard of proficiency in reading across the nation. Although from 1992 to 2013 the average scale score has increased a statistically significant five points, the frightening low proficiency level in 2013 indicates current practices in reading instruction need to be improved. According to NAEP, “Fourth grade students performing at the Proficient level should be able to integrate and interpret texts and apply their understanding of the text to draw conclusions and make evaluations” (nces.ed.gov). Thus, in 2013, 66% of students assessed by NAEP could not perform these essential reading tasks.

Results on the NAEP Reading Assessment for the research district's state of Nebraska, do not prove to be much better than the national trend. In 2013, Nebraska's average scale score on NAEP was 2 points higher than the national average. Only 37% of grade 4 students in Nebraska were proficient or advanced on the NAEP, compared to 34% of students nationwide. Longitudinal data reveals a much more alarming trend for Nebraska. From 1992 to 2013, the average scale score increased from 221 to 223; however, this is not a statistically significant difference.

Analysis of the research district's 2012-2013 Nebraska State Accountability Reading (NeSA-R) test data indicates elementary reading performance is equal to state performance at a proficiency level of 78% (Nebraska Department of Education, 2013). In 2012-2013, 2,880 elementary students (grades 3-6) from the research district completed the NeSA-R. Even at a respectable 78% proficiency level, 634 students remain below grade level proficiency. In order to reach 100% grade level proficiency, measures must be taken to decrease the number, 634 or 22%, of students not meeting grade level expectations.

The Nebraska Performance Accountability System (NePAS) Status Ranking ranks school districts by their students' average scale scores on state tests. The research district's overall rank (grades 3-5) in the state of Nebraska during the 2012-2013 school year was 158 out of 249. The NePAS Improvement Ranking ranks school districts by the difference in the average reading scales scores of different students in the same grade. The research district's improvement rank (grades 3-5) was 109 out of 248 schools. The NePAS Growth Ranking ranks districts by the difference in average reading scale scores of the same students from current year to the previous year. The research district's

Growth Ranking was 128 out of 243 schools. The Growth Ranking places the research district behind 47% of the schools in the state of Nebraska. Analysis of the Nebraska Performance Accountability System rankings illuminates reading performance that is middle of the pack. This NeSA-R data coupled with the alarming NAEP data demanded the research district take another approach to reading instruction.

A key teaching practice that has developed over the last seventy years, beginning with Emmett Betts' identification of reading levels in 1946, is Guided Reading. "Guided Reading is a teaching approach designed to help individual students learn how to process a variety of increasingly challenging texts with understanding and fluency" (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001, p. 193). The goal of Guided Reading is to help students develop skills and strategies to problem solve text, make meaning of text, and read independently in a wide variety of texts.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the effects of new district Guided Reading protocols on elementary students' reading proficiency as measured by the Nebraska State Accountability-Reading (NeSA-R) student cohort scores from 2013 to 2014.

This study analyzed mean scale scores of three cohorts of students and one All Cohort group in all of the research district's fifteen elementary schools. Cohort 1 included research district students who were in grade 3 during the entirety of the 2012-2013 school year and in grade 4 during the entirety of the 2013-2014. The students' unique identification number from the Nebraska Staff and Student Records System (NSSRS) was used to ensure only students enrolled in both school years were included in

the cohort. Cohort 2 included research district students who were in grade 4 during the entirety of the 2012-2013 school year and in grade 5 during the entirety of the 2013-2014. The students' unique identification number from the Nebraska Staff and Student Records System (NSSRS) was used to ensure only students enrolled in both school years are included in the cohort. Cohort 3 included research district students who were in grade 5 during the entirety of the 2012-2013 school year and in grade 6 during the entirety of the 2013-2014. The students' unique identification number from the Nebraska Staff and Student Records System (NSSRS) was used to ensure only students enrolled in both school years were included in the cohort. All Cohorts included research district students in all three cohorts. The students' unique identification number from the Nebraska Staff and Student Records System (NSSRS) was used to ensure only students enrolled in both school years were included in the cohort. Students taking the NeSA-R during the entirety of the 2012-2013 school year received instruction in reading without district-wide Guided Reading protocols. Students during the entirety of the 2013-2014 school year received instruction in reading with district-wide Guided Reading protocols.

The new Guided Reading protocols were informed by the work of Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell, "Founts & Pinnell." Before the 2013-2014 school year, Guided Reading was only a suggested teaching practice. Teachers were not required to utilize Guided Reading as an instructional practice and no district-wide protocols were established. Without a requirement from the district to utilize Guided Reading as a teaching practice, the usage of Guided Reading was left to the discretion of the teacher; this led to an inconsistent application of Guided Reading as a teaching practice district-wide.

Importance of the Study

As early as 1978, research began to suggest that grade 3 reading achievement is a characteristic that differentiates dropouts from graduates (Lloyd, 1978, p. 1197). For the next three decades, research continued to suggest grade 3 reading achievement, and reading achievement in general, as an important indicator of student achievement. Both President George W. Bush in the 2001 Elementary and Secondary Education Act - No Child Left Behind and President Barrack Obama in the 2010 A Blue Print for Reform acknowledged the importance of early reading achievement. In 2012, Donald Hernandez in *Double Jeopardy: How Third-Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation* states, “Students who do not read proficiently by third grade are four times more likely to leave school without a diploma than proficient readers” (p. 4). Third grade is a pivotal grade for students. Kindergarten through second grade represents a time when students are learning to read. Third grade and beyond is characterized by reading to learn. If a student is not proficient at the skill of reading early in their educational career, research suggests these students are more likely not to graduate. The 1985 Report of the Commission on Reading, *Becoming a Nation of Readers*, declares, “Reading is a basic life skill” (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985, p. 1). This study is important in determining what a district can do to improve reading instruction and promote this basic skill of life.

Next, this study is important in that the findings could serve as a model for other districts. Reading instruction and the desire to improve reading achievement is ubiquitous in school districts. The Guided Reading components identified by this

research study could provide guidance to districts as they look to implement or modify Guided Reading instruction.

Literature Related to the Study Purpose

Recommendations from the National Reading Panel

In 2000, the National Reading Panel completed their three-year review and summary of over 100,000 reading studies on how children learn to read. The objective of the National Reading Panel was to establish which evidence-based instructional practices are most effective when teaching children to read. The National Reading Panel's examination of the most effective teaching practices for reading instruction concluded that "...the best approach to reading instruction is one that incorporates the following: explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, systematic phonics instruction, methods to improve fluency, and ways to enhance comprehension" (National Reading Panel, 2013, para. 9). Guided Oral Reading, or Guided Reading, is one part of a balanced literacy program the National Reading Panel views as an effective teaching practice.

Through the structure and inclusion of specific Guided Reading components, a teacher can incorporate guided instruction on the recommended areas from the National Reading Panel, also referred to as the Five Pillars of Literacy Instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Instruction in Phonemic Awareness and Phonics is addressed through the role of the teacher, appropriately selected text, and "word work" at the conclusion of a Guided Reading lesson. In a Guided Reading group, the teacher introduces the selected text to the Guided Reading group. This introduction is an opportunity for the teacher to demonstrate and model how one might break down a word into its smaller segments, phonemes, in an attempt to

sound out an unknown word. The appropriately selected text will offer students exposure to vocabulary mostly at their command; however, it will also provide new words the students may be unfamiliar with. This exposure provides the student with the opportunity to use problem-solving skills to dissect the word into phonemes to ultimately understand the word. The teacher may also prompt students or provide feedback during the Guided Reading lesson to assist students with understanding. At the conclusion of a lesson, the teacher may conduct “word work.” Word work is an opportunity for the teacher to guide the students through the deconstruction of words in the attempt to make meaning. The word work example is based on the needs of the students in the Guided Reading group, strategically prepared by the teacher.

Guided Reading also addresses the pillar of fluency. Fluency is “the ability to recognize words easily, read with greater speed, accuracy, and expression to better understand what is read” (National Reading Panel, 2013, para. 10). First, Guided Reading offers the student the opportunity to practice reading with an appropriately leveled text in which they have command of a large majority of the text. This practice in an appropriately leveled text allows students to practice fluent reading as they encounter text with a small amount of new challenges, which helps the reading process become more automatic for students and is critical in reading instruction. As students progress in reading, they will be moved to higher reading levels where they will encounter new texts with greater demands, increasing their ability to read with speed, accuracy, and expression. The teacher also plays a crucial role in the direct instruction of fluency. The teacher introduces and guides students when they encounter words that pose a problem. During the Guided Reading lesson, teachers provide direct feedback and prompting to the

students. Feedback is essential to any learning process. In fact, John Hattie (2009) asserts feedback has an effect size of $d = .73$. The feedback provided by the teacher provides real time information to students on *how they are doing*.

Comprehension is perhaps the most critical component of reading; without comprehension, readers fail to make meaning of the text. Comprehension is addressed and supported throughout the Guided Reading lesson. During the introduction, the teacher introduces the structure, content, vocabulary, and plot of the text. This skillfully crafted introduction provides the students with a frame of reference on which they can construct meaning while reading the text. During the reading, the teacher prompts students to think while reading certain passages. Upon the conclusion of the reading, the teacher guides a discussion of the text. The teacher poses questions that require the student to think “within the text, about the text, and beyond the text” (Fountas and Pinnell, 2008, p. 244). During this discussion, students also experience the discussion of the group. Participating in a discussion with a community of learners allows students to review their own thinking while considering the thoughts and input of his or her peers. Comprehension is also aided through the use of appropriate leveled text. The appropriately leveled text allows the students the opportunity to construct meaning from the text more easily than a difficult text. However, this practice of constructing meaning at an instructional level text prepares students to make meaning independently when they encounter more difficult texts.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework in this study corresponds to Ruddell and Unrau’s Socio-cognitive Model of Reading - Reading as a Meaning Construction Process

(Ruddell & Unrau, 1994). This theory provides a sound basis for the implementation and effectiveness of Guided Reading.

Reading as a Meaning Construction Process

Ruddell and Unrau's Reading as a Meaning Construction Process is a "constructivist perspective of learning in which the teacher creates a learning environment that engages the reader in active comprehension through confronting and solving authentic problems in a social context" (Ruddell & Unrau, 1994 p. 1497).

Ruddell and Unrau's theory consists of three components: the Reader, the Teacher, and the Text and Classroom Context. These three components constantly change while meaning negotiation and meaning construction take place. Seven key assumptions exist in this model (Ruddell and Unrau, 1994, p. 1463).

1. Readers – even beginning readers – are active theory builders and hypothesis testers.
2. Language and reading performance is directly related to the reader's environment.
3. The driving force behind language performance and reading growth is the reader's need to obtain meaning.
4. Oral and written language development, which affect the thinking process, contribute directly to the development of reading ability.
5. Readers construct meaning not only of printed manuscripts but also of events, speech, and behaviors as they "read" gestures, images, symbols, signs, and signals that are embedded in a social and cultural environment.

6. Texts are constantly reinvented as readers construct different understandings for them in a hermeneutic circle. Meanings for texts are dynamic, not static, as individuals, texts, and contexts change and interact.
7. The role of the teacher is critical in negotiating and facilitating meaning construction in the text and social context of the classroom.

These seven assumptions illustrate the complexity of constructing meaning from text. The assumptions also illuminate the importance of the teacher in the meaning making process. Guided Reading provides a structure where teachers can attend to and support students as they grapple with these seven assumptions.

The Reader

Readers use “prior beliefs and knowledge” and “knowledge use and control” to navigate the meaning making process while reading text. A reader’s prior beliefs and knowledge consist of pre-existing factors, both affective (why a reader reads) and cognitive (factual knowledge about the world). A reader constantly accesses what he/she knows about the world and couples that with his or her motivations to read to construct meaning. As a reader develops, he/she enhances their knowledge use and control, which guides a reader through the meaning-construction process. The complexity of this process necessitates guidance from a teacher.

The Teacher

“Teachers engage the students in a collaborative process of inquiry and self-improvement in which both teacher and student seek to refine respective skills and knowledge (Ruddell and Unrau, 1994, p. 1491). A teacher’s prior beliefs and knowledge have a significant impact on his/her own knowledge use and control. A teacher uses

his/her knowledge to assess students' reading and make real time adjustments to instruction during Guided Reading. A teacher can capitalize on teachable moments, provide appropriate support, and engage a student in a dialogue over a text. The guidance offered by the teacher during the meaning-construction process is essential to the development of readers.

Text and Classroom Context

“How teachers structure text-related tasks, who carries the power of authority, and concern for the socio-cultural meaning can make major differences in the goals the readers attempt to achieve and the way readers feel about themselves” (Alvermann, Young, Green, & Wisenbaker, 1999). The specific text that is chosen and the underlying context presented with the text contribute to the way a reader internalizes a text. Again, the role of the teacher in astutely selecting appropriate text cannot be understated. In a Guided Reading lesson, a teacher chooses materials that provide an appropriate amount of struggle for a student. It is at this level of text, where a teacher can guide students and foster development as a reader.

Guided Reading Components

Fountas & Pinnell: The Essential Components of Guided Reading

Guided Reading experts Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell have identified seven essential components of Guided Reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996, p. 4):

1. A teacher works with a small group.
2. Children in the group are similar in their development of a reading process and are able to read about the same level of text.

3. Teachers introduce the stories to assist children's reading in ways that help to develop independent reading strategies.
4. Each child reads the whole text.
5. The goal is for children to read independently and silently.
6. The emphasis is on reading increasingly challenging books over time.
7. Children are grouped and regrouped in a dynamic process that involves ongoing observation and assessment.

These seven essential components of Guided Reading function to meet the overall purpose of Guided Reading and enable children to read for meaning. The seven essential components also served to guide the research district in the design and implementation of Guided Reading.

The Zone of Proximal Development

Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky's Theory of the Zone of Proximal Development provides foundational support to several key elements of Guided Reading: appropriate groups, appropriate text, and appropriate guidance from the teacher. Vygotsky recognized a need to identify different developmental levels in learners, specifically children: the Actual Developmental Level and the Zone of Proximal Development. The Actual Developmental Level is characterized by what a learner can do independently. The Zone of Proximal Development is characterized by those functions in a learner that have not yet fully matured. The Zone of Proximal Development is "the distance between the Actual Developmental Level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined

through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p.86).

The theory of a Zone of Proximal Development posits learning precedes development. Vygotsky (1978) states, “... learning creates the zone of proximal development; that is, learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes.... Once these processes are internalized, they become part of the child’s developmental achievement” (p.90). The goal of Guided Reading is to help students internalize reading skills and strategies so they become part of the child’s reading developmental achievement. Ultimately, the student will be able to create meaning out of text independently.

The instruction and structure of Guided Reading is grounded in the theory of the Zone of Proximal Development. All instruction during Guided Reading takes place at the student’s instructional reading level. The instructional reading level is characterized by text where a student displays control over a majority of the text, yet opportunities to learn ideas still exist.

The New Guided Reading Protocols

Expectations

The implementation of the new Guided Reading protocols in the research district provided clear guidance on the instruction of Guided Reading. The protocols were based on the research and recommendations of Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell. One year prior to the implementation of the new Guided Reading protocols, a curriculum writing committee comprised of district administrators, teachers, and district Reading Specialists

collaborated one day a month to plan and prepare for the implementation. The new Guided Reading protocols were:

1. Each classroom teacher will teach Guided Reading for 60 minutes a day.
2. Guided Reading will take place in small group settings with groups formed by similar instructional needs.
3. The initial Guided Reading groups will be established using the Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System.
4. Guided Reading groups will be flexible, not static.
5. Teachers will follow a suggested Guided Reading lesson format consisting of a defined teaching goal, an introduction to the text, reading the text, discussion of the text, and teaching for processing strategies. Optional lesson components include word work activities and extending the meaning activities.
6. Students will read texts at their determined instructional reading level.
7. Teachers will use texts leveled following the Fountas & Pinnell Text Level Gradient.
8. Teachers will monitor reading progress through the use of a Running Record.

Prior to Implementation

During the summer of 2013, prior to the implementation of the new Guided Reading protocols, Reading Specialists delivered a series of two-day trainings to virtually all elementary teachers in the research district on the new Guided Reading protocols. Day one of the training focused on the administration of the Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System. Day two's primary focus was lesson planning, and conducting a Running Record.

Implementation

Throughout the year of implementation, the research district provided follow-up professional development on Guided Reading to ensure consistency. District administrators and Instructional Coaches provided or designed the majority of professional development sessions. Professional development topics included: Lesson Planning, When to Move Students to the Next Level, and How to Conduct a Running Record. Along with professional development sessions, the district also maintained an online forum for discussion and questions moderated by district administrators and Instructional Coaches.

Research Questions:

The following research questions were used to analyze the effects of Guided Reading on Nebraska State Accountability-Reading (NeSA-R) student cohort scores from 2013 to 2014.

Is there a relationship between student cohort scores on NeSA-R and the adoption of the new district Guided Reading protocols?

Overarching Pretest-Posttest Proficiency Research Question #1: Was there a difference among student cohort's mean scale scores on the spring 2013 NeSA-R after the implementation of traditional reading curriculum?

Analysis: Research Question #1 was analyzed by using a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to determine the difference among the mean scale scores of students in three cohorts on the spring 2013 NeSA-R. An *F-ratio* was calculated with an alpha level of .05 to test the null hypothesis. Post hoc analysis was conducted to determine if there was a main effect significance.

Overarching Pretest-Posttest Proficiency Research Question #2: Were the mean scale scores of students in Cohort 1 who were administered the NeSA-R in the spring of 2014 after the adoption of the new district Guided Reading protocols lower than, consistent with, or above their mean scale scores on the NeSA-R in the spring of 2013 after the implementation of traditional reading curriculum?

Analysis: Research Question #2 was analyzed by using a repeated measure *t* test to determine the difference between the mean scale scores of students in Cohort 1 on the spring 2014 NeSA-R after the adoption of the new district Guided Reading protocols. An alpha level of .05 was used to control for Type I errors.

Sub-Question Pretest-Posttest Proficiency Research Question #2a: Was the number of students identified as Below the Standards, Meets the Standards, or Exceeds the Standards in Cohort 1 who were administered the NeSA-R in the spring of 2014 after the adoption of the new district Guided Reading protocols lower than, consistent with, or above the number of students identified as Below the Standards, Meets the Standards, or Exceeds the Standards on the NeSA-R in the spring of 2013 after the implementation of traditional reading curriculum?

Analysis: Research Sub-Question #2a was analyzed by using a chi-square test for goodness of fit to determine if the sampling distribution of students in Cohort 1 who were administered the 2014 NeSA-R after the adoption of the new district Guided Reading protocols differs from the sampling distribution of students who were administered the 2013 NeSA-R after the implementation of the traditional reading curriculum. An alpha level of .05 was used to control for Type I errors.

Overarching Pretest-Posttest Proficiency Research Question #3: Were the mean scale scores of students in Cohort 2 who were administered the NeSA-R in the spring of 2014 after the adoption of the new district Guided Reading protocols lower than, consistent with, or above their mean scale scores on the NeSA-R in the spring of 2013 after the implementation of traditional reading curriculum?

Analysis: Research Question #3 was analyzed by using a repeated measure *t* test to determine the difference between the mean scale scores of students in Cohort 2 on the spring 2014 NeSA-R after the adoption of the new district Guided Reading protocols. An alpha level of .05 was used to control for Type I errors.

Sub-Question Pretest-Posttest Proficiency Research Question #3a: Was the number of students identified as Below the Standards, Meets the Standards, or Exceeds the Standards in Cohort 2 who were administered the NeSA-R in the spring of 2014 after the adoption of the new district Guided Reading protocols lower than, consistent with, or above the number of students identified as Below the Standards, Meets the Standards, or Exceeds the Standards on the NeSA-R in the spring of 2013 after the implementation of traditional reading curriculum?

Analysis: Research Sub-Question #3a was analyzed by using a chi-square test for goodness of fit to determine if the sampling distribution of students in Cohort 2 who were administered the 2014 NeSA-R after the adoption of the new district Guided Reading protocols differs from the sampling distribution of students who were administered the 2013 NeSA-R after the implementation of the traditional reading curriculum. An alpha level of .05 was used to control for Type I errors.

Overarching Pretest-Posttest Proficiency Research Question #4: Were the mean scale scores of students in Cohort 3 who were administered the NeSA-R in the spring of 2014 after the adoption of the new district Guided Reading protocols lower than, congruent with, or above their mean scale scores on the NeSA-R in the spring of 2013 after the implementation of traditional reading curriculum?

Analysis: Research Question #4 was analyzed by using a repeated measure *t* test to determine the difference between the mean scale scores of students in Cohort 3 on the spring 2014 NeSA-R after the adoption of the new district Guided Reading protocols. An alpha level of .05 was used to control for Type I errors.

Sub-Question Pretest-Posttest Proficiency Research Question #4a: Was the number of students identified as Below the Standards, Meets the Standards, or Exceeds the Standards in Cohort 3 who were administered the NeSA-R in the spring of 2014 after the adoption of the new district Guided Reading protocols lower than, consistent with, or above the number of students identified as Below the Standards, Meets the Standards, or Exceeds the Standards on the NeSA-R in the spring of 2013 after the implementation of traditional reading curriculum?

Analysis: Research Sub-Question #4a was analyzed by using a chi-square test for goodness of fit to determine if the sampling distribution of students in Cohort 3 who were administered the 2014 NeSA-R after the adoption of the new district Guided Reading protocols differs from the sampling distribution of students who were administered the 2013 NeSA-R after the implementation of the traditional reading curriculum. An alpha level of .05 was used to control for Type I errors.

Overarching Pretest-Posttest Proficiency Research Question #5: Were the mean scale scores of students in All Cohorts who were administered the NeSA-R in the spring of 2014 after the adoption of the new district Guided Reading protocols lower than, consistent with, or above their mean scale scores on the NeSA-R in the spring of 2013 after the implementation of traditional reading curriculum?

Analysis: Research Question #5 was analyzed by using a repeated measure *t* test to determine the difference between the mean scale scores of students in All Cohorts on the spring 2014 NeSA-R after the adoption of the new district Guided Reading protocols. An alpha level of .05 was used to control for Type I errors.

Sub-Question Pretest-Posttest Proficiency Research Question #5a: Was the number of students identified as Below the Standards, Meets the Standards, or Exceeds the Standards in all cohorts who were administered the NeSA-R in the spring of 2014 after the adoption of the new district Guided Reading protocols lower than, consistent with, or above the number of students identified as Below the Standards, Meets the Standards, or Exceeds the Standards on the NeSA-R in the spring of 2013 after the implementation of traditional reading curriculum?

Analysis: Research Sub-Question #5a was analyzed by using a chi-square test for goodness of fit to determine if the sampling distribution of students in all cohorts who were administered the 2014 NeSA-R after the adoption of the new district Guided Reading protocols differs from the sampling distribution of students who were administered the 2013 NeSA-R after the implementation of the traditional reading curriculum. An alpha level of .05 was used to control for Type I errors.

Definition of Terms

Nebraska State Accountability – Reading (NeSA-R). The State of Nebraska compulsory test of reading for all students in grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 11. The NeSA-Reading tests, by law, are directly aligned with Nebraska’s Academic Standards. Students receive one of the following three Performance Level Descriptors: Below the Standards, Meets the Standards, or Exceeds the Standards (Nebraska Department of Education, 2014) *taken from NeSA Reports Interpretive Guide, Spring 2014*

Nebraska Performance Accountability System (NePAS). State accountability system developed by the State Board of Education and the Nebraska Department of Education. The system is intended to inform educators, parents, school board members, community members and policymakers about the learning progress of Nebraska schools and school districts (Nebraska Department of Education, 2014).

Proficiency on NeSA – R. Three student performance levels exist: Below the Standards, Meets the Standards, Exceeds the Standards, therefore establishing two cut points. For federal reporting purposes, Proficiency is defined as students performing at Meets the Standards and Exceeds the Standards levels. The Nebraska State Board of Education chose these labels after the standard setting events; the labels used during the events were Basic, Proficient, and Advanced.

Scale Score Metric. For reporting purposes, logits are converted into the Scale Score Metric, which are mathematically equivalent but more user-friendly. The Nebraska School Board of Education determined that the Meets the Standards level will begin at a Scale Score of 85 for all grades, and the Exceeds the Standards will begin at 135. These values will be used for all grades and will not change from year to year.

Guided Reading. “Guided Reading is a teaching approach designed to help individual students learn how to process a variety of increasingly challenging texts with understanding and fluency” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001, p. 193).

Assumptions

This study assumes the number of sample students analyzed in each of the three cohorts (Cohort 1, $n = 50$; Cohort 2, $n = 50$; Cohort 3, $n = 50$; All Cohorts, $n = 150$) will yield valid results. All teachers (grades K-6) in the research district received training on the research district’s specific Guided Reading components prior to the beginning of the 2013-2014 school year. This study assumes all teachers (grades K-6) implemented Guided Reading with fidelity.

Delimitations

This study is defined by three cohorts of students in grades 3, 4, 5, and 6 in a suburban school district who were in attendance from the fall of 2012 to the spring of 2014. Student variances in ability are not addressed in this study. Teacher variances in ability to conduct Guided Reading are not addressed in this study. Factors unique to individual buildings that may have impacted individual results are not addressed. Students in grades K, 1, and 2 were not included in this study due to the lack of required statewide assessment results in these grades.

Limitations

Several limitations of this study should be noted. The scope of this study will be limited to one year. Changes in performance on the NeSA-R may be credited to other factors than the implementation of Guided Reading. Students’ previous experiences with

reading may be a factor in pretest and posttest scores. The availability of reading support at home may contribute to the outcome of achievement data.

Significance

The research conducted in this study has the potential to add to the literature on literacy research, practice, and policy. It is of significant interest to educators beginning, planning, and implementing Guided Reading on a district scale.

Contribution to Research. A large body of literature exists discussing the need for effective literacy instruction. A substantial amount of literature also exists on the opinions and approaches to carry out literacy instruction. While Guided Reading is widely recognized as an effective literacy instructional strategy, less literature has been provided to identify the effective components of Guided Reading. This research study will provide educators with data to identify the effective components of Guided Reading to include and support in a district implementation of Guided Reading.

Contribution to Practice. Based on the outcomes of this study, the district may decide to alter or maintain current practice for Guided Reading.

Contribution to Policy. Based on the outcomes of this study, there may be far reaching implications that might affect middle school and high school programs. These implications may necessitate policy changes regarding courses of study and requirements for graduation.

Outline of the Study

The literature review relevant to this study is presented in Chapter 2. This review provides a detailed account of the effective components of Guided Reading. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology that will be used to gather and analyze the data of the

study. Chapter 4 will report the research results, and Chapter 5 will provide conclusions and discussions of the research results.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

In its simplest form, Guided Reading provides a mechanism for teachers to read with students in a way that cannot be accomplished by reading aloud to students or having students read silently to themselves. Guided Reading is not a new teaching practice. Aspects of Guided Reading, such as small group instruction, the teacher setting the purpose for reading, and the idea of different levels of text have been prevalent in reading instruction over the past fifty years. As new research provides information on reading instructional best practices, Guided Reading evolves. Due to the fundamental importance of reading instruction, it is imperative to continue to evaluate the current literature on Guided Reading instruction.

A Historical Perspective

From the mid 1940's, with Emmett Betts's introduction of the Directed Reading Activity, to the mid-1990's with the introduction of Fountas and Pinnell's *Guided Reading: Good First Teaching for All Children* (1996), a lively debate persisted in a quest to determine the most effective means of reading instruction. Multiple times over the last seventy years, researchers and teachers have witnessed the pendulum swing from small-group instruction to whole-group instruction back to small-group instruction. Early Guided Reading instruction was characterized by the use of three ability groups: Below, On Level, and High. The use of three groups is accompanied by ineffective practices such as round robin reading and a surface level discussion of the text. Over time, research and teachers, relying on practical knowledge and experience, began to question these practices. The static ability grouping techniques were deemed detrimental to

students. To counter the negative effects of the static ability small groups, whole-group instruction became the preferred instructional practice. However, whole-group instruction created a new set of problems for students. Students in a whole-group setting received instruction in text that was too easy for some and too difficult for others. For the last twenty years, Guided Reading has been heavily influenced by the pivotal work of Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell. As Ford & Opitz (2008) state, "...with the publication of Fountas and Pinnell's book *Guided Reading: Good First Teaching for All Children* (1996), Guided Reading began to shift from being an instructional technique to use with small groups to a way of defining small-group instruction" (p. 71). Michael Ford and Michael Opitz in the article *Guided Reading: Then and Now* (2008), synthesized seventy years worth of literature on reading instruction, and Guided Reading specifically, to arrive at eleven common understandings on Guided Reading (p. 75-77):

1. All children have the ability to become literate.
2. All children need to be taught by a skilled teacher in order to maximize their full potential in reading.
3. The goal of Guided Reading is to help children become independent readers.
4. Guided Reading is but one component of an effective reading program.
5. Reading for meaning is the primary goal of Guided Reading.
6. Children learn to read by reading.
7. Children need to become metacognitive: Knowing what they know, the why and how of reading.
8. Children need to develop a self-extending system of strategies in order to be independent readers.

9. All children need to be exposed to higher-level thinking activities.
10. Children need to experience joy and delight as a result of the reading experience.
11. Specific elements characterize the successful Guided Reading lesson.

Guided Reading is a broad term; it can mean many different things to many different people. Guided Reading practices could be radically different from one district to the next or even from one teacher's classroom to their neighbor's classroom. However, as Ford & Opitz state, "Regardless of decade or author, all agree that Guided Reading is planned, intentional, focused instruction when the teacher helps students, usually in small-groups, learn more about the reading process" (p. 71).

Guided Reading as a District-wide Instructional Practice

A national reading survey conducted by Ford & Opitz (2008) of 1,500 elementary teachers suggests confusion on the purpose of Guided Reading as an instructional practice. Confusion ranged from the overall purpose of Guided Reading to a lack of understanding on the importance of individual components of Guided Reading. Confusion also exists on the role Guided Reading plays in the overall Reading Language Arts block of teaching and learning. A need exists to synthesize the relevant information on Guided Reading to isolate the effective components of Guided Reading in order to provide school districts with a reproducible model to promote effective Guided Reading. However, isolating the effective components of Guided Reading is only the first step in the process of implementing successful Guided Reading teaching practices and protocols. A systematic approach to Guided Reading provides multiple benefits to a school district. When a program, protocol, or practice is implemented district-wide, resources and

supports need to be more focused and efficient, rather than trying to support many different practices across the district. For example, systematic district-wide approach to Guided Reading, specifically the administration of Running Records, allows for more realistic data collection. Both Running Record and general reading data can be evaluated and analyzed across the district providing critical information on areas of strength and opportunities for support. Without a district-wide systematic approach, this information cannot be collected because common data does not exist. This common data also serves to increase the effectiveness of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). The common data provides a “basis for comparison, they [teachers] cannot identify strengths and weaknesses in their teaching and are unable to determine if an area in which a student is struggling is a function of the curriculum, their strategies, or their students” (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2010, p. 184). PLCs can analyze and discuss common data, which provides a foundation for improved teaching and learning.

Effective Guided Reading Instruction

Establishing the effective components of Guided Reading has mass appeal. As school districts or individual buildings look to employ instructional strategies that will yield an increase in student achievement, it is important to consider what factors make a specific teaching practice effective. It is not enough to simply implement “Guided Reading”; great care and consideration must be given to the specific components of Guided Reading a district will require and support. A school district could consider this research and construct Guided Reading practices and procedures based on the stated effective components. The effective components of Guided Reading explored in this

literature review are the benefits of small-group instruction, reading instructional level text, flexible grouping, and progress monitoring.

Guided Reading is an essential part of a well-balanced Reading Language Arts Teaching & Learning block containing whole group reading instruction, writing, spelling/word work, handwriting, and Guided Reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). A plethora of research information exists on reading instruction, specifically Guided Reading. However, when considering the effective components of Guided Reading, it is important to consider those components that are grounded in research, supporting their inclusion into district-wide Guided Reading protocols. John Hattie (2009), in his review of over 800 meta-analyses, provides valuable insight regarding which teaching practices are effective or not effective. Hattie (2009) sets an effect size standard of $d = 0.4$ as a “hinge point where effects of treatments enhance achievement in such a way that we can notice real world differences” (p. 16). A number of teaching practices discussed by Hattie are evident in and can be applied to Guided Reading. Such practices are formative evaluation $d = .90$, feedback $d = .73$, vocabulary programs $d = .67$, phonics instruction $d = .60$, peer influence $d = .53$, and small-group learning $d = .49$. When exploring “exposure to reading,” Hattie discusses a study by Henk Blok (1999), where exposure to reading yields an effect size of $d = .41$ where the benefits were higher with younger students and when groups were small. This scientific research provides a solid foundation for the components of Guided Reading.

Effective Guided Reading Instruction: The Role of the Teacher

The role of the teacher is paramount to the success of Guided Reading. The name alone, “Guided Reading,” suggests the teacher is guiding the reading process as opposed

to independent reading or Silent Sustained Reading (SSR) where the teacher is not present to coach during the reading process. Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole (1999) from the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA) conducted a national study of effective schools and accomplished teachers. The CIERA report found, "...coaching during reading may be one of the most significant distinctions between highly effective schools and moderately or less effective schools" (p. 158). For example, Taylor et al. (1999) monitored teachers in the study during phonics instruction. Many schools teach phonics in isolation; however, in schools deemed Most Effective in the CIERA study, coaching on phonics during reading was utilized 54% of the time observed compared to 17% for Moderately Effective schools, and 13% for Least Effective schools. Teachers in the most effective schools were able to prompt students on phonics instruction during the Guided Reading lessons, helping the student make meaning of words while in the act of reading. In Guided Reading, teachers serve as coaches of readers where it is less about teaching text content and more about teaching strategies to students. Patricia Antonacci (2000) states, "Rather than transmitting knowledge that the teacher processes, students construct their own knowledge through transactions about the text where language is an important tool in learning" (p. 25).

Every Guided Reading lesson can vary because of the different needs of the groups, however. Fountas & Pinnell (2001) offer a Guided Reading Framework to provide a basic structure and format to each Guided Reading lesson. Fountas & Pinnell identify these five components as essential to each lesson:

1. Selecting the text.
2. Introducing the text.

3. Reading the text.
4. Discussing and revisiting the text.
5. Teaching for processing strategies.

The teacher's role in each step of the framework is essential to reading success. Teachers select an appropriate text, which allows students to expand and apply his/her processing strategies. The selected text offers an appropriate amount of challenge for the students and meets the desired lesson goal of the teacher. The text introduction is opportunity for the teacher to make the text accessible to readers. Teachers set the stage for the reading that is about to occur. During the reading of the text, the teacher can prompt and support the student "...in tackling the necessary problem solving to overcome the difficulties they may encounter" (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001, p. 191). Discussing and revisiting the text provides an opportunity for teachers and students to engage in discussion about the text. The teacher skillfully plans and asks questions related to information about the text, within the text, and beyond the text. Finally, when a teacher teaches for processing, they identify teachable moments in the reading the students just completed and instruct on those points, providing real-time learning and support to students.

The Role of the Teacher in the Zone of Proximal Development

Guided Reading provides an opportunity for students to develop their skills for reading in a way that independent reading or Silent Sustained Reading do not. The difference again is the role of the teacher. "Through specific teaching and careful text selection, you [teachers] make it possible for students to learn more than they could on their own" (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001, p. 191). Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky's Theory of the Zone of Proximal Development provides foundational support to several

key elements of Guided Reading: appropriate groups, appropriate text, and appropriate guidance from the teacher. Vygotsky recognized a need to identify different developmental levels in learners, specifically children: the Actual Developmental Level and the Zone of Proximal Development. The Actual Developmental Level is characterized by what a learner can do independently. The Zone of Proximal Development is characterized by those functions in a learner that have not yet fully matured (Vygotsky, 1978). The teacher provides guidance in a student's Zone of Proximal Development during a Guided Reading lesson. The teacher supports the student as they encounter new learning by selecting appropriate text, introducing the text, prompting while reading the text, discussing the text, and teaching for processing after the reading. "In Vygotskyian sense, Guided Reading makes it possible to teach at the cutting edge of a student's understanding" (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001, p. 192).

Effective Guided Reading Instruction: Small-Group Instruction

A key practice of Guided Reading is the use of small group instruction. A long lasting debate has existed as to which methods to utilize during the teaching of reading. The tide has shifted from whole-group to small-group to whole-group and again back to small-group. Ford & Opitz (2008) suggest that the topic of Guided Reading has had an increase in popularity over the past seven years "because of the realization by practitioners of the value in small-group instruction" (p. 309). The literature suggest small-group instruction, $d = .49$, is effective because a teacher can provide specifically what students' need rather than spend time on whole-class drills that are too hard or too easy for students (Hattie, 2009; ISquint, 2006; Scherer, Pinnell, Lyons, & Fountas, 2005). The CIERA study found schools identified as Most Effective, utilized small-group

reading instruction far more than Moderately Effective or Least Effective schools. Most Effective schools used small-group instruction for 60 minutes a day, Moderately Effective schools used small-group instruction for 26 minutes a day, and Least Effective schools used small-group instruction 38 minutes a day (Taylor et al., 1999, p. 157).

During Guided Reading small group instruction consists of, preferably, 4-5 small groups containing 2-5 students (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Small-group instruction is used to provide a more favorable student to teacher ratio when teaching students skills and strategies, especially in reading. As previously stated, the goal of Guided Reading is to support students in their process to become independent readers. Meeting in small groups provides teachers with the opportunity to tailor instruction for a group, and sometimes, individual basis. Through small-group instruction, teachers can learn more about their students as readers and attend to their needs in a more efficient and effective way.

Effective Guided Reading Instruction: Leveled Text

The practice of using leveled text to teach reading has been in existence since at least 1848 when William Holmes McGuffey determined text level difficulty in his *McGuffey Readers* (Stange, 2013, p. 113). Emmett Betts, in his text *Foundations of Reading Instruction* (1946), identified four basic categories associated with levels of reading difficulty: Basal, Instructional, Frustration, and Capacity. Marie Clay (2005) identifies three levels of text: easy text, instructional text, and hard text (p. 55). It is important to note, “The terms easy, instructional, and hard...do not describe the characteristics of the text itself. They describe how a particular child reads the text” (p.55). Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell have expanded and clarified the different levels

of text with their Fountas & Pinnell Text Level Gradient; and, based on the work of Marie Clay, have identified three categories associated with the different text levels: Independent, Instructional, and Frustration (CITE). Like Clay (2005), these terms do not refer to the text itself, but how a student will read the text. According to Fountas & Pinnell, an independent text is one where a student can read the words with 95 – 100% accuracy for Levels A-K and 98 – 100% accuracy for levels L-Z. An instructional level text is read at 90 – 94% accuracy for levels A-K and 95 – 100% accuracy for level L-Z. A frustration level text is read at an accuracy level below 90% (Fountas & Pinnell, 2008, p. 39).

In Guided Reading, a student's Instructional reading level represents his or her Zone of Proximal Development. The Zone of Proximal Development denotes the area in which a student has not mastered certain tasks, but can accomplish them with the support of a teacher. In the instructional level, text offers a minimum of new things to learn, providing students with the opportunity to construct meaning of the text by reading with high levels of accuracy, fluency, and comprehension (Allington, 2013; Antonacci, 2000; Cox & Hopkins, 2006; Pikulski, 1994). As students' problem solving skills increase, the difficulty and demand of the instructional text should also increase along a gradient of text, such as the Fountas & Pinnell Text Level Gradient. Instructional materials should pose a challenge that is appropriate for the student (Pinnell & Fountas, 2010; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Iaquina, 2006; Scharer et al., 2005). When instructional materials have a difficulty level not appropriate for a group of struggling students, the teacher actually spends more time scaffolding instruction, so the students can access the text, than the

student spends reading. This is not an instructional practice that will produce independent readers due to the lack of reading practice.

Reading Success and Emotion

The literature also suggests another consideration in support of students utilizing appropriately leveled instructional materials - emotion. Students utilizing materials at their instructional level, experience reading success and a positive emotional experience is logged by the reader's brain (Pinnell & Fountas, 2010; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Lyons, 2003; Scharer et al., 2005). This positive emotional experience can improve memory and comprehension (Scharer et al., 2005) as the human brain prefers positive emotional experiences.

Appropriately leveled texts give students enjoyable reading moments. Reading practices that foster positive emotional experiences are critical to reading instruction. Laura Erlauer (2003) states, "Because memories are so closely tied to emotions, teachers bear a heavy responsibility; every day they evoke emotions and mold memories in their students" (p. 12). When a student experiences fear or anxiety, the fight-or-flight stress response is triggered in the brain. The limbic system commandeers control of specific neurological functions such as; breathing, heart rate, and muscle tension to manage this stress response. This, unfortunately, is not conducive to learning. During the stress response, oxygen rich blood is drawn away from the neocortex in a neurological "downshift" to support the limbic system functions (Cash, 2011; Erlauer, 2003). The neocortex is responsible for high-level thinking, problem solving, language, planning, vision, and pattern recognition. These neurological functions are essential to the meaning making process of reading. As nutrients and energy flee the neocortex to support the

limbic system during the fight-or-flight response, learning is put on hold. Prolonged exposure to stressful experiences is detrimental to learning. It is crucial to the development of the reading brain to experience success while reading. Students reading an instructional level text confront problems just above their independent reading level. With the help of a skilled teacher, the student can problem solve words in the instructional level and experience the positive feeling of encountering a barrier and overcoming it.

Effective Guided Reading Instruction: Flexible Grouping

As students' reading development progresses at different rates, a flexible grouping strategy is necessary to provide students access to materials at their instructional level. It is paramount that students be able to move to different groups easily as their specific needs change. This is a dramatic shift from previous Guided Reading grouping strategies where the reading groups remained static. "The fundamental difference between the two approaches (basal approach and Guided Reading) lies in pitching instruction to the child's literacy level and the need for dynamic grouping of children for instruction" (Antonacci, 2000, p. 19). Traditional Guided Reading practices organized students into low, on-level, or high reading groups and students remained in those groups for the entirety of the school year. Teachers spend more time scaffolding instruction so students can access a "low level" text than students spend actually reading. This is the exact opposite of what needs to be happening with struggling readers; they need to spend more time reading. This practice would account for stagnant reading performance.

Guided Reading protocols that promote flexible and dynamic grouping are essential. Research suggests students in low groups have less chance of moving to a

higher reading group and actually read less because they receive less exposure to appropriately leveled instructional materials (Clay, 1993; Pinnell & Fountas, 2010, Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Iaquinta, 2006). Exposure to different text is a critical component of learning to read (Allington, 2013; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Hattie, 2009). Another significant factor in why students do not flexibly move to different groups is a lack of systematic observation of student reading (Clay, 1993; Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). Frequent and systematic observation will assist teachers with their decisions to move and re-group students based on need rather than the traditional static low, on-level, high reading groups. “Assessment-informed instruction should mean that small groups in Guided Reading will be organized in a much more fluid, flexible manner avoiding the static, fixed membership of the ability groups of the past” (The Wright Group, 1996).

Effective Guided Reading Instruction: Progress Monitoring

Progress monitoring has been defined as the “...frequent and ongoing measurement of student knowledge and skills and the examination of student data to evaluate instruction” (Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 2007, p. 74). Monitoring student progress ensures for more effective and efficient teaching. According to the National Center on Student Progress Monitoring (n.d.), five benefits occur from the frequent monitoring of student progress:

1. Accelerated learning because students receive more appropriate instruction.
2. More informed instructional decisions.
3. More efficient communication with families and other professionals about students’ progress.
4. Documentation of student progress for accountability purposes.

5. Higher expectations of students on the part of the teacher.

A hallmark of successful Guided Reading protocols and practices is a progress monitoring tool, developed by Marie Clay, called the Running Record. The Running Record commonly used in today's Guided Reading groups is an adaptation of Clay's Running Record developed by Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell. The Running Record is a specific tool utilized by teachers to monitor student reading progress, diagnose reading needs, and adapt instruction (Clay, 1993; Fountas & Pinnell, 2012, Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Pikulski, 1994; Ross, 2004). Frequent and systematic progress monitoring is essential to understanding the reader. Progress monitoring allows the teacher to plan and deliver specific targeted instruction, measure if that instruction is effective, and know when to move a student to a new level.

Research supports when teachers employ a regular and systematic approach to formatively evaluating student progress, student achievement improves (Black & Wiliam, 2010; Hattie, 2009; Luckner & Bowen, 2010; Pikulski, 1994, Ross, 2004). Dylan Wiliam (2014) suggests, "Assessment is the bridge between teaching and learning." Running Records provide more than just feedback to the teacher on how the student is progressing; they provide feedback to the teacher on the effectiveness of his or her own instruction. This type of feedback has an effect size of $d = .73$ and this kind of broader formative evaluation has an effect size of $d = .90$ (Hattie, 2009). These are significant effect sizes and provide ample evidence to why systematic formative evaluation in the form of a Running Record must be an essential component of Guided Reading. Teachers must know if the practices they are employing are affecting reading development in the

intended way. Formative assessment, administered with fidelity, in the form of a Running Record provides this information.

In a study comparing schools that utilize Running Records with those that do not, in the same school district, John Ross (2004) found schools that implement systematic Running Records improved reading by statistically significant levels and outperformed schools in the same district not implementing Running Records. This information is significant considering the research of Bean, Cassidy, Grumet, Shelton, and Wallis (2002), where they report 62% of Reading Specialists use Running Records as a progress monitoring tool. Research supports progress monitoring through Running Records as an effective strategy, yet 38% of Reading Specialists indicated they do not utilize this effective tool. Ford and Opitz (2008), in their survey of 1,500 teachers found 75% of teachers use Running Records in Guided Reading instruction. This number sounds promising, however, upon closer investigation, of the 75%, only 32% conduct a Running Record monthly and 36% conduct a Running Record less than once a month. Therefore, 68% of the participants surveyed conduct a Running Record once or less than once a month. This may be appropriate for students reading at a higher level, but it is simply too much time in between Running Record administrations to be an effective tool to inform instruction on struggling readers. Teachers must have more frequent information on how students are reading.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Introduction

“Reading is the process of understanding the written language. It begins with a flutter of patterns on the retina and ends (when successful) with a definite idea about the author’s intended message. Thus, reading is at once a “perceptual” and “cognitive” process (Rumelhart, 1994). Given the complexity of this process, the importance of defining effective literacy instruction is undeniable. A universal need exists for quality reading instruction aimed at developing a student’s understanding of the written language.

A key teaching practice that has developed over the last seventy years, beginning with Emmett Betts’ identification of reading levels in 1946, is Guided Reading. “Guided Reading is a teaching approach designed to help individual students learn how to process a variety of increasingly challenging texts with understanding and fluency” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001, p. 193). The goal of Guided Reading is to help students develop skills and strategies to problem solve text, make meaning of text, and read independently in a wide variety of texts.

Purpose

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the effects of new district Guided Reading protocols on elementary students’ reading proficiency as measured by the Nebraska State Accountability-Reading (NeSA-R) student cohort scores from 2013 to 2014.

This study analyzed mean scale scores of three cohorts of students and one All Cohort group in all of the research district's fifteen elementary schools. Cohort 1 included research district students who were in grade 3 during the entirety of the 2012-2013 school year and in grade 4 during the entirety of the 2013-2014. The students' unique identification number from the Nebraska Staff and Student Records System (NSSRS) was used to ensure only students enrolled in both school years were included in the cohort. Cohort 2 included research district students who were in grade 4 during the entirety of the 2012-2013 school year and in grade 5 during the entirety of the 2013-2014. The students' unique identification number from the Nebraska Staff and Student Records System (NSSRS) was used to ensure only students enrolled in both school years are included in the cohort. Cohort 3 included research district students who were in grade 5 during the entirety of the 2012-2013 school year and in grade 6 during the entirety of the 2013-2014. The students' unique identification number from the Nebraska Staff and Student Records System (NSSRS) was used to ensure only students enrolled in both school years were included in the cohort. All Cohorts included research district students in all three cohorts. The students' unique identification number from the Nebraska Staff and Student Records System (NSSRS) was used to ensure only students enrolled in both school years were included in the cohort. Students taking the NeSA-R during the entirety of the 2012-2013 school year received instruction in reading without district-wide Guided Reading protocols. Students during the entirety of the 2013-2014 school year received instruction in reading with district-wide Guided Reading protocols.

Research Design

A pretest, posttest three-group efficacy study is displayed in the following notation:

Group 1 $X_1 Y_1 O_1 Y_2 O_2$

Group 2 $X_1 Y_1 O_1 Y_2 O_2$

Group 3 $X_1 Y_1 O_1 Y_2 O_2$

Group 4 $X_1 Y_1 O_1 Y_2 O_2$

Group 1 = Cohort 1 (Grade 3 in 2013, Grade 4 in 2014, $n = 50$)

Group 2 = Cohort 2 (Grade 4 in 2013, Grade 5 in 2014, $n = 50$)

Group 3 = Cohort 3 (Grade 5 in 2013, Grade 6 in 2014, $n = 50$)

Group 4 = All Cohorts (Grades 3, 4, 5 in 2013, Grades 4, 5, 6 in 2014, $n = 150$)

X_1 = Study Constant. All students in regular education classes in the research district throughout the implementation of the new district Guided Reading protocols.

Y_1 = Traditional reading curriculum Grades 3, 4, 5

Y_2 = New district Guided Reading protocols Grades 4, 5, 6

O_1 = Mean NeSA-R scale reading scores for Grades 3, 4, 5 (administered spring 2013)

O_2 = Mean NeSA-R scale reading scores for Grades 4, 5, 6 (administered spring 2014)

Implementation of the Independent Variables

This study's independent variables are the implementation of traditional reading curriculum in 2012-2013 and the adoption of new district Guided Reading protocols in 2013-2014. Virtually all students received specific Guided Reading instruction.

Y_1 = Traditional reading curriculum Grades 3, 4, 5

Y_2 = New district Guided Reading protocols Grades 4, 5, 6

Dependent Variables

This study's dependent variables are the mean scale scores of students in each of the three matched cohorts on the NeSA-R in 2013 and the NeSA-R in 2014.

O₁ = Mean NeSA-R scale reading scores for Grades 3, 4, 5 (administered spring 2013)

O₂ = Mean NeSA-R scale reading scores for Grade 4, 5, 6 (administered spring 2014)

All NeSA-R data was retrieved from the research district's secure data management system. All data are archival, retrospective, and de-identified by appropriate research district personnel.

Research Questions, Instruments, and Data Analysis:

The following research questions were used to analyze the effects of Guided Reading on Nebraska State Accountability-Reading (NeSA-R) student cohort scores from 2013 to 2014.

Is there a relationship between student cohort scores on NeSA-R and the adoption of the new district Guided Reading protocols?

Overarching Pretest-Posttest Proficiency Research Question #1: Was there a difference among student cohort's mean scale score on the spring 2013 NeSA-R after the implementation of traditional reading curriculum?

Analysis: Research Question #1 was analyzed by using a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to determine the difference among the mean scale scores of students in three cohorts on the spring 2013 NeSA-R. An *F-ratio* was calculated with an alpha level of .05 to test the null hypothesis. Post hoc analysis was conducted to determine if there is a main effect significance.

Overarching Pretest-Posttest Proficiency Research Question #2: Were the mean scale scores of students in Cohort 1 who were administered the NeSA-R in the spring of 2014 after the adoption of the new district Guided Reading protocols lower than, consistent with, or above their mean scale scores on the NeSA-R in the spring of 2013 after the implementation of traditional reading curriculum?

Analysis: Research Question #2 was analyzed by using a repeated measure *t* test to determine the difference between the mean scale scores of students in Cohort 1 on the spring 2014 NeSA-R after the adoption of the new district Guided Reading protocols. An alpha level of .05 was used to control for Type I errors.

Sub-Question Pretest-Posttest Proficiency Research Question #2a: Was the number of students identified as Below the Standards, Meets the Standards, or Exceeds the Standards in Cohort 1 who were administered the NeSA-R in the spring of 2014 after the adoption of the new district Guided Reading protocols lower than, consistent with, or above the number of students identified as Below the Standards, Meets the Standards, or Exceeds the Standards on the NeSA-R in the spring of 2013 after the implementation of traditional reading curriculum?

Analysis: Research Sub-Question #2a was analyzed by using a chi-square test for goodness of fit to determine if the sampling distribution of students in Cohort 1 who were administered the 2014 NeSA-R after the adoption of the new district Guided Reading protocols differs from the sampling distribution of students who were administered the 2013 NeSA-R after the implementation of the traditional reading curriculum. An alpha level of .05 was used to control for Type I errors.

Overarching Pretest-Posttest Proficiency Research Question #3: Were the mean scale scores of students in Cohort 2 who were administered the NeSA-R in the spring of 2014 after the adoption of the new district Guided Reading protocols lower than, consistent with, or above their mean scale scores on the NeSA-R in the spring of 2013 after the implementation of traditional reading curriculum?

Analysis: Research Question #3 was analyzed by using a repeated measure *t* test to determine the difference between the mean scale scores of students in Cohort 2 on the spring 2014 NeSA-R after the adoption of the new district Guided Reading protocols. An alpha level of .05 was used to control for Type I errors.

Sub-Question Pretest-Posttest Proficiency Research Question #3a: Was the number of students identified as Below the Standards, Meets the Standards, or Exceeds the Standards in Cohort 2 who were administered the NeSA-R in the spring of 2014 after the adoption of the new district Guided Reading protocols lower than, consistent with, or above the number of students identified as Below the Standards, Meets the Standards, or Exceeds the Standards on the NeSA-R in the spring of 2013 after the implementation of traditional reading curriculum?

Analysis: Research Sub-Question #3a was analyzed by using a chi-square test for goodness of fit to determine if the sampling distribution of students in Cohort 2 who were administered the 2014 NeSA-R after the adoption of the new district Guided Reading protocols differs from the sampling distribution of students who were administered the 2013 NeSA-R after the implementation of the traditional reading curriculum. An alpha level of .05 was used to control for Type I errors.

Overarching Pretest-Posttest Proficiency Research Question #4: Were the mean scale scores of students in Cohort 3 who were administered the NeSA-R in the spring of 2014 after the adoption of the new district Guided Reading protocols lower than, congruent with, or above their mean scale scores on the NeSA-R in the spring of 2013 after the implementation of traditional reading curriculum?

Analysis: Research Question #4 was analyzed by using a repeated measure *t* test to determine the difference between the mean scale scores of students in Cohort 3 on the spring 2014 NeSA-R after the adoption of the new district Guided Reading protocols. An alpha level of .05 was used to control for Type I errors.

Sub-Question Pretest-Posttest Proficiency Research Question #4a: Was the number of students identified as Below the Standards, Meets the Standards, or Exceeds the Standards in Cohort 3 who were administered the NeSA-R in the spring of 2014 after the adoption of the new district Guided Reading protocols lower than, consistent with, or above the number of students identified as Below the Standards, Meets the Standards, or Exceeds the Standards on the NeSA-R in the spring of 2013 after the implementation of traditional reading curriculum?

Analysis: Research Sub-Question #4a was analyzed by using a chi-square test for goodness of fit to determine if the sampling distribution of students in Cohort 3 who were administered the 2014 NeSA-R after the adoption of the new district Guided Reading protocols differs from the sampling distribution of students who were administered the 2013 NeSA-R after the implementation of the traditional reading curriculum. An alpha level of .05 was used to control for Type I errors.

Overarching Pretest-Posttest Proficiency Research Question #5: Were the mean scale scores of students in All Cohorts who were administered the NeSA-R in the spring of 2014 after the adoption of the new district Guided Reading protocols lower than, consistent with, or above their mean scale scores on the NeSA-R in the spring of 2013 after the implementation of traditional reading curriculum?

Analysis: Research Question #5 was analyzed by using a repeated measure *t* test to determine the difference between the mean scale scores of students in All Cohorts on the spring 2014 NeSA-R after the adoption of the new district Guided Reading protocols. An alpha level of .05 was used to control for Type I errors.

Sub-Question Pretest-Posttest Proficiency Research Question #5a: Was the number of students identified as Below the Standards, Meets the Standards, or Exceeds the Standards in all cohorts who were administered the NeSA-R in the spring of 2014 after the adoption of the new district Guided Reading protocols lower than, consistent with, or above the number of students identified as Below the Standards, Meets the Standards, or Exceeds the Standards on the NeSA-R in the spring of 2013 after the implementation of traditional reading curriculum?

Analysis: Research Sub-Question #5a was analyzed by using a chi-square test for goodness of fit to determine if the sampling distribution of students in All Cohorts who were administered the 2014 NeSA-R after the adoption of the new district Guided Reading protocols differs from the sampling distribution of students who were administered the 2013 NeSA-R after the implementation of the traditional reading curriculum. An alpha level of .05 was used to control for Type I errors.

Subjects

Cohorts of Subjects. Cohort 1 contained randomly selected students from the research district who were in grade 3 during the entire 2012-2013 school year and in grade 4 during the entire 2013-2014 school year. Cohort 2 contained randomly selected students from the research district who were in grade 4 during the entire 2012-2013 school year and in grade 5 during the entire 2013-2014 school year. Cohort 3 contained randomly selected students from the research district who were in grade 5 during the entire 2012-2013 school year and in grade 6 during the entire 2013-2014 school year.

Number of Subjects. From each grade level cohort, $n = 50$ sample subjects were randomly selected for Cohort 1, $n = 50$, for Cohort 2, $n = 50$, and for Cohort 3, $n = 50$.

Gender of Subjects. In Cohort 1, 46% were male and 54% were female. In Cohort 2, 46% were male and 56% were female. In Cohort 3, 54% were male and 46% were female.

Racial and Ethnic Identification of Subjects. In Cohort 1, 70% were Caucasian; 10% were Hispanic; 8% were Black/African American; 6% were two or more races; 2% were American Indian/Alaska Native; 2% were Asian; 2% were Pacific Islander. In Cohort 2, 70% were Caucasian; 10% were Hispanic; 10% were Black/African American; 4% were American Indian/Alaska Native; 6% were Asian. In Cohort 3, 68% were Caucasian; 12% were Hispanic; 8% were Black/African American; 4% were two or more races; 2% were American Indian/Alaska Native; 6% were Asian.

Inclusion Criteria for Subjects. All students in grades 3, 4, and 5 of the research district who were in attendance for the entirety of the 2012-2013 school year and the entirety of the 2013-2014 school year formed the pool of possible research subjects.

From this pool, three cohorts of $n = 50$ randomly selected students were formed and included in the study.

Data Collection Procedures

All research data are retrospective, archival, and routinely collected school district information. Permission from the appropriate school district personnel was obtained. Three cohorts were constructed with $n = 50$ randomly selected students from the naturally formed grade level groups. Achievement data for each of the three cohorts was obtained. Aggregated cohort data, descriptive statistics, and parametric statistical analysis were utilized and reported with means and standard deviations on tables.

Research Site. The research was conducted in the public school setting through normal educational practices. The study procedures did not interfere with the practices of the research district or any of the district's school sites. Data was stored on spreadsheets and computer flash drives for statistical analysis in the office of the primary researcher. Data and computer files were securely stored. No individual identifiers were attached to the data.

Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects

Approval Category. Exemptions for this study were provided under Category 1. This research was conducted in established accepted educational settings and involving normal educational practices. A letter of support from the research district was provided for the University of Nebraska Medical Center/University of Nebraska at Omaha Joint Institutional Review Board review.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the effects of new district Guided Reading protocols on elementary students' reading proficiency as measured by the Nebraska State Accountability-Reading (NeSA-R) student cohort scores from 2013 to 2014.

This study analyzed mean scale scores of three cohorts of students and one All Cohort group in all of the research district's fifteen elementary schools. Cohort 1 included research district students who were in grade 3 during the entirety of the 2012-2013 school year and in grade 4 during the entirety of the 2013-2014. The students' unique identification number from the Nebraska Staff and Student Records System (NSSRS) was used to ensure only students enrolled in both school years were included in the cohort. Cohort 2 included research district students who were in grade 4 during the entirety of the 2012-2013 school year and in grade 5 during the entirety of the 2013-2014. The students' unique identification number from the Nebraska Staff and Student Records System (NSSRS) was used to ensure only students enrolled in both school years are included in the cohort. Cohort 3 included research district students who were in grade 5 during the entirety of the 2012-2013 school year and in grade 6 during the entirety of the 2013-2014. The students' unique identification number from the Nebraska Staff and Student Records System (NSSRS) was used to ensure only students enrolled in both school years were included in the cohort. All Cohorts included research district students in all three cohorts. The students' unique identification number from the Nebraska Staff

and Student Records System (NSSRS) was used to ensure only students enrolled in both school years were included in the cohort. Students taking the NeSA-R during the entirety of the 2012-2013 school year received instruction in reading without district-wide Guided Reading protocols. Students during the entirety of the 2013-2014 school year received instruction in reading with district-wide Guided Reading protocols.

The new Guided Reading protocols were informed by the work of Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell, “Founts & Pinnell.” Before the 2013-2014 school year, Guided Reading was only a suggested teaching practice. Teachers were not required to utilize Guided Reading as an instructional practice and no district-wide protocols were established. Without a requirement from the district to utilize Guided Reading as a teaching practice, the usage of Guided Reading was left to the discretion of the teacher; this led to an inconsistent application of Guided Reading as a teaching practice district-wide.

Results

Research Question #1

Did the three student cohorts perform at corresponding mean scale score levels on the spring 2013 NeSA-R after receiving traditional reading instruction? Data on the demographics of the three cohorts is displayed in Table 1.

The first hypothesis was tested using a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) test. There was no statistically significant difference between the three cohorts $F(2, 149) = .360, p = 0.70$. Means and standard deviations are displayed in Table 2. ANOVA results are displayed in Table 3.

Research Question #2

Did the students in Cohort 1 perform on the 2014 NeSA-R at a level lower than, consistent with, or above their performance on the 2013 NeSA-R?

The second hypothesis was tested using a repeated measure t test. There was a statistically significant difference between the 2014 NeSA-R results ($M = 118.54$, $SD = 34.12$) and the 2013 NeSA-R results ($M = 111.02$, $SD = 31.90$), $t(1, 49) = 2.46$, $p < .018$, $d = .40$. Mean scale scores and standard deviations are displayed in Table 4; t -test results and effect size are displayed in Table 5.

Research Sub-Question #2a

Did the number of students in Cohort 1 identified as Below Standards, Meets Standards, or Exceeds Standards on the 2014 NeSA-R differ from the number of students identified as Below Standards, Meets Standards, or Exceeds Standards on the 2013 NeSA-R?

The sub-question hypothesis was tested using a chi-square test for goodness of fit. There was a statistically significant difference between the 2014 NeSA-R population distribution and the 2013 NeSA-R population distribution $\chi^2(2, n = 50) = 10.70$, $p < .05$. Chi-square results are displayed in Table 6.

Research Question #3

Did the students in Cohort 2 perform on the 2014 NeSA-R at a level lower than, consistent with, or above their performance on the 2013 NeSA-R?

The third hypothesis was tested using a repeated measure t test. There was a statistically significant difference between the 2014 NeSA-R results ($M = 128.32$, $SD = 30.79$) and the 2013 NeSA-R results ($M = 116.8$, $SD = 29.36$), $t(1, 49) = 3.47$, $p < .01$, d

= .50. Mean scale scores and standard deviations are displayed in Table 4; *t*-test results and effect size are displayed in Table 7.

Research Sub-Question #3a

Did the number of students in Cohort 2 identified as Below Standards, Meets Standards, or Exceeds Standards on the 2014 NeSA-R differ from the number of students identified as Below Standards, Meets Standards, or Exceeds Standards on the 2013 NeSA-R?

The sub-question hypothesis was tested using a chi-square test for goodness of fit. There was a statistically significant difference between the 2014 NeSA-R population distribution and the 2013 NeSA-R population distribution $\chi^2(2, n = 50) = 10.47, p < .05$. Chi-square results are displayed in Table 8.

Research Question #4

Did the students in Cohort 3 perform on the 2014 NeSA-R at a level lower than, consistent with, or above their performance on the 2013 NeSA-R?

The fourth hypothesis was tested using a repeated measure *t* test. There was no statistically significant difference between the 2014 NeSA-R results ($M = 122.40, SD = 32.99$) and the 2013 NeSA-R results ($M = 114.34, SD = 40.31$), $t(1, 49) = 1.85, p < .07$. Mean scale scores and standard deviations are displayed in Table 4; *t*-test results and effect size are displayed in Table 9.

Research Sub-Question #4a

Did the number of students in Cohort 3 identified as Below Standards, Meets Standards, or Exceeds Standards on the 2014 NeSA-R differ from the number of students

identified as Below Standards, Meets Standards, or Exceeds Standards on the 2013 NeSA-R?

The sub-question hypothesis was tested using a chi-square test for goodness of fit. There was no statistically significant difference between the 2014 NeSA-R population distribution and the 2013 NeSA-R population distribution $\chi^2 (2, n = 50) = 3.53, p > .05$. Chi-square results are displayed in Table 10.

Research Question #5

Did the students in All Cohorts perform on the 2014 NeSA-R at a level lower than, consistent with, or above their performance on the 2013 NeSA-R?

The fifth hypothesis was tested using a repeated measure *t* test. There was a statistically significant difference between the 2014 NeSA-R results ($M = 123.09, SD = 32.69$) and the 2013 NeSA-R results ($M = 114.05, SD = 34.03$), $t (1, 149) = 4.33, p < .01, d = .40$. Mean scale scores and standard deviations are displayed in Table 4; *t*-test results and effect size are displayed in Table 11.

Research Sub-Question #5a

Did the number of students in All Cohorts identified as Below Standards, Meets Standards, or Exceeds Standards on the 2014 NeSA-R differ from the number of students identified as Below Standards, Meets Standards, or Exceeds Standards on the 2013 NeSA-R?

The sub-question hypothesis was tested using a chi-square test for goodness of fit. There was a statistically significant difference between the 2014 NeSA-R population distribution and the 2013 NeSA-R population distribution $\chi^2 (2, n = 150) = 15.28, p < .05$. Chi square results are displayed in Table 12.

Table 1

Demographic Information of Four Cohorts of Matched Students Tested on 2013 NeSA-R and 2014 NeSA-R

	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	All Cohorts
Total	<i>n</i> = 50	<i>n</i> = 50	<i>n</i> = 50	<i>n</i> = 150
Male	46%	46%	54%	48%
Female	54%	54%	46%	52%
% Caucasian	70%	70%	68%	69%
% African-Am	8%	10%	8%	9%
% Asian	2%	6%	6%	3%
% Hispanic	10%	10%	12%	11%
% Am Indian/ Alaska Native	2%	4%	2%	3%
% Two or more Races	6%	0%	4%	3%
% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	2%	0%	0%	1%

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Student Cohorts on the 2013 NeSA-R

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Cohort 1	111.02	31.90
Cohort 2	116.80	29.36
Cohort 3	114.34	40.31
All Cohorts	114.05	32.69

Table 3

ANOVA of Three Cohorts for Effect of 2013 NeSA-R Mean Scale Score

	<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Between Groups	841.37	2	420.69	.36	.70
Within Groups	171738.20	147	1168.29		
Total	172579.57	149			

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for Student Cohorts on the 2013 NeSA-R and 2014 NeSA-R

		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Cohort 1	2013	111.02	31.90
Cohort 1	2014	118.54	34.12
Cohort 2	2013	116.80	29.36
Cohort 2	2014	128.32	30.79
Cohort 3	2013	114.34	40.31
Cohort 3	2014	122.40	32.99
All Cohorts	2013	114.05	34.03
All Cohorts	2014	123.09	32.69

Table 5

Student Cohort 1 Pretest-Posttest Results, 2013 NeSA-R and 2014 NeSA-R

<i>Cohort 1 2013 NeSA-R</i>		<i>Cohort 1 2014 NeSA-R</i>		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
111.02	31.90	118.54	34.12	2.46	.02	.40

Table 6

Student Cohort 1 Population Distribution, 2013 NeSA-R and 2014 NeSA-R

Frequency	2013	2014	χ^2
	Observed	Expected	
	N (%)	N (%)	
Below Standards	12 (24%)	11 (22%)	
Meets Standards	22 (44%)	31 (62%)	
Exceeds Standards	16 (32%)	8 (16%)	
Total	50 (100%)	50 (100%)	10.70

Table 7

Student Cohort 2 Pretest-Posttest Results, 2013 NeSA-R and 2014 NeSA-R

<i>Cohort 2 2013 NeSA-R</i>		<i>Cohort 2 2014 NeSA-R</i>		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
116.80	29.36	128.32	30.79	3.47	.01	.50

Table 8

Student Cohort 2 Population Distribution, 2013 NeSA-R and 2014 NeSA-R

Frequency	2014	2014	χ^2
	Observed	Expected	
	N (%)	N (%)	
Below Standards	5 (10%)	4 (8%)	
Meets Standards	25 (50%)	35 (70%)	
Exceeds Standards	20 (40%)	11 (22%)	
Total	50 (100%)	50 (100%)	10.47

Table 9

Student Cohort 3 Pretest-Posttest Results, 2013 NeSA-R and 2014 NeSA-R

<i>Cohort 3 2013 NeSA-R</i>		<i>Cohort 3 2014 NeSA-R</i>		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
114.34	40.31	122.40	32.99	1.85	.07

Table 10

Student Cohort 3 Population Distribution, 2013 NeSA-R and 2014 NeSA-R

Frequency	2013	2014	χ^2
	Observed	Expected	
	N (%)	N (%)	
Below Standards	4 (8%)	9 (18%)	
Meets Standards	28 (56%)	26 (52%)	
Exceeds Standards	18 (36%)	15 (30%)	
Total	50 (100%)	50 (100%)	3.53

Table 11

Student All Cohorts Pretest-Posttest Results, 2013 NeSA-R and 2014 NeSA-R

<i>All Cohorts 2013 NeSA-R</i>		<i>All Cohorts 2014 NeSA-R</i>		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
114.05	34.03	123.09	32.69	4.33	.01	.40

Table 12

Student All Cohort Population Distribution, 2013 NeSA-R and 2014 NeSA-R

Frequency	2013	2014	χ^2
	Observed	Expected	
	N (%)	N (%)	
Below Standards	21 (14%)	24 (16%)	
Meets Standards	75 (50%)	92 (61%)	
Exceeds Standards	54 (36%)	34 (23%)	
Total	150 (100%)	150 (100%)	15.28

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion and Discussion

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the effects of new district Guided Reading protocols on elementary students' reading proficiency as measured by the Nebraska State Accountability-Reading (NeSA-R) student cohort scores from 2013 to 2014.

This study analyzed mean scale scores of three cohorts of students and one All Cohort group in all of the research district's fifteen elementary schools. Cohort 1 included research district students who were in grade 3 during the entirety of the 2012-2013 school year and in grade 4 during the entirety of the 2013-2014. The students' unique identification number from the Nebraska Staff and Student Records System (NSSRS) was used to ensure only students enrolled in both school years were included in the cohort. Cohort 2 included research district students who were in grade 4 during the entirety of the 2012-2013 school year and in grade 5 during the entirety of the 2013-2014. The students' unique identification number from the Nebraska Staff and Student Records System (NSSRS) was used to ensure only students enrolled in both school years are included in the cohort. Cohort 3 included research district students who were in grade 5 during the entirety of the 2012-2013 school year and in grade 6 during the entirety of the 2013-2014. The students' unique identification number from the Nebraska Staff and Student Records System (NSSRS) was used to ensure only students enrolled in both school years were included in the cohort. All Cohorts included research district students in all three cohorts. The students' unique identification number from the Nebraska Staff

and Student Records System (NSSRS) was used to ensure only students enrolled in both school years were included in the cohort. Students taking the NeSA-R during the entirety of the 2012-2013 school year received instruction in reading without district-wide Guided Reading protocols. Students during the entirety of the 2013-2014 school year received instruction in reading with district-wide Guided Reading protocols.

The new Guided Reading protocols were informed by the work of Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell, “Founts & Pinnell.” Before the 2013-2014 school year, Guided Reading was only a suggested teaching practice. Teachers were not required to utilize Guided Reading as an instructional practice and no district-wide protocols were established. Without a requirement from the district to utilize Guided Reading as a teaching practice, the usage of Guided Reading was left to the discretion of the teacher; this led to an inconsistent application of Guided Reading as a teaching practice district-wide.

Conclusions

The following conclusions were drawn from the study for each of the seven research questions.

Research Question #1

Research question #1 was used to analyze whether the three student cohorts performed at consistent levels on the 2013 NeSA-R after receiving traditional reading instruction. There was no statistically significant difference between the three cohorts.

Research Question #2 and 2a

Research question #2 and 2a were used to analyze whether students in Cohort 1 performed on the 2014 NeSA-R at a level lower than, consistent with, or above their

performance on the 2013 NeSA-R. Students in Cohort 1 (grade 3 in 2013, grade 4 in 2014) performed at a level of statistical significance higher on the 2014 NeSA-R after the implementation of the new district Guided Reading protocols than they had on the 2013 NeSA-R after the implementation of traditional reading instruction. Analysis indicates a medium effect size difference made by the new Guided Reading protocols. Student mean scale scores increased on average 13.6 points, 40% of a standard deviation.

Cohort 1 proficiency on the NeSA-R decreased from 78% proficient in 2013 to 76% proficient in 2014. This appears to be counterintuitive given the increase in mean scale score. However, research sub-question #2a was used to analyze whether the number of students in Cohort 1 identified at Below Standards, Meets Standards, or Exceeds Standards on the 2014 NeSA-R differed from the number of students identified as Below Standards, Meets Standards, or Exceeds Standards on the 2013 NeSA-R. The chi square test for goodness of fit indicates a significant difference in the population distribution. The distribution of Cohort 1 students on the 2013 NeSA-R were 22% Below Standards, 62% Meets Standards, and 16% Exceeds Standards. The distribution of Cohort 1 students on the 2014 NeSA-R were 24% Below Standards, 44% Meets Standards, and 32% Exceeds Standards. The increase in mean scale score contributed to a 100% increase in the number of students categorized as Exceeds Standards, 16% in 2013 to 32% in 2014.

Research Question #3 and 3a

Research question #3 and 3a were used to analyze whether students in Cohort 2 performed on the 2014 NeSA-R at a level lower than, consistent with, or above their performance on the 2013 NeSA-R. Students in Cohort 2 (grade 4 in 2013, grade 5 in

2014) performed at a level of statistical significance higher on the 2014 NeSA-R after the implementation of the new district Guided Reading protocols than they had on the 2013 NeSA-R after the implementation of traditional reading instruction. Analysis indicates a medium effect size difference made by the new Guided Reading protocols. Student mean scale scores increased on average 15.4 points, 50% of a standard deviation.

Cohort 2 proficiency on the NeSA-R decreased from 92% proficient in 2013 to 90% proficient in 2014. This appears to be counterintuitive given the increase in mean scale score. Research sub-question #3a was used to analyze whether the number of students in Cohort 2 identified at Below Standards, Meets Standards, or Exceeds Standards on the 2014 NeSA-R differed from the number of students identified as Below Standards, Meets Standards, or Exceeds Standards on the 2013 NeSA-R. The chi square test for goodness of fit indicates a statistically significant difference in the population distribution. The distribution of Cohort 2 students on the 2013 NeSA-R were 8% Below Standards, 70% Meets Standards, and 22% Exceeds Standards. The distribution of Cohort 2 students on the 2014 NeSA-R were 10% Below Standards, 50% Meets Standards, and 40% Exceeds Standards. The increase in mean scale score contributed to an 81% increase in the number of students categorized as Exceeds Standards, 22% in 2013 to 40% in 2014.

Research Question #4 and 4a

Research question #4 was used to analyze whether students in Cohort 3 performed on the 2014 NeSA-R at a level lower than, consistent with, or above their performance on the 2013 NeSA-R. Students in Cohort 3 (grade 5 in 2013, grade 6 in 2014) did not performed at a level of statistical significance higher on the 2014 NeSA-R after the

implementation of the new district Guided Reading protocols than they had on the 2013 NeSA-R after the implementation of traditional reading instruction.

Research sub-question #4a was used to analyze whether the number of students in Cohort 3 identified at Below Standards, Meets Standards, or Exceeds Standards on the 2014 NeSA-R differed from the number of students identified as Below Standards, Meets Standards, or Exceeds Standards on the 2013 NeSA-R. The chi square test for goodness of fit did not yield a statistically significant difference in the population distribution. The distribution of Cohort 3 students on the 2013 NeSA-R were 18% Below Standards, 52% Meets Standards, and 30% Exceeds Standards. The distribution of Cohort 3 students on the 2014 NeSA-R were 8% Below Standards, 56% Meets Standards, and 36% Exceeds Standards.

Research question #5 and 5a

Research question #5 and 5a were used to analyze whether students in All Cohorts performed on the 2014 NeSA-R at a level lower than, consistent with, or above their performance on the 2013 NeSA-R. Students in All Cohorts performed at a level of statistical significance higher on the 2014 NeSA-R after the implementation of the new district Guided Reading protocols than they had on the NeSA-R after the implementation of traditional reading instruction. Analysis indicates a medium effect size difference made by the new Guided Reading protocols. Student mean scale scores increased on average 13.1 points, 40% of a standard deviation.

All Cohort proficiency on the NeSA-R increased from 84% proficient in 2013 to 86% proficient in 2014. Research sub-question #5a was used to analyze whether the number of students in all cohorts identified at Below Standards, Meets Standards, or

Exceeds Standards on the 2014 NeSA-R differed from the number of students identified as Below Standards, Meets Standards, or Exceeds Standards on the 2013 NeSA-R. The chi square test for goodness of fit indicates a significant difference in the population distribution. The distribution of All Cohort students on the 2013 NeSA-R were 16% Below Standards, 61% Meets Standards, and 23% Exceeds Standards. The distribution of all cohort students on the 2014 NeSA-R were 14% Below Standards, 50% Meets Standards, and 36% Exceeds Standards. The increase in mean scale score contributed to a 59% increase in the number of students categorized as Exceeds Standards, 23% in 2013 to 36% in 2014, and a 12.5% decrease in the number of students categorized as Below Standards, 16% in 2013 and 14% in 2014.

Discussion

Implications for Research

This study was conducted to determine the effect of new district Guided Reading protocols on mean NeSA-R scales scores. The study indicates statistically significant effects upon student performance on the NeSA-R after the implementation of new district Guided Reading protocols on three of the four test groups. This study also points to the need for more research. Subsequent research could focus specifically on the impact of Guided Reading on students at or above grade level expectations versus the impact of Guided Reading on students below grade level expectations. This study yielded results that show positive effects for students at or above grade level reading expectations; however, in two of the cohorts examined, the number of students categorized as Below Standards on the NeSA-R increased. Further research is needed to explore Guided Reading's impact on students reading below grade level expectations. Subsequent

research is also needed to explore who the students are that are categorized as Below Standards and Guided Reading's impact on those students. Is the Below Standards category comprised of students identified as English Language Learners (ELL), students receiving Special Education services, or some other designation and how does Guided Reading affect these students?

Students in Cohort 3 (grade 5 in 2013, grade 6 in 2014) did not performed at a level of statistical significance higher on the 2014 NeSA-R after the implementation of the new district Guided Reading protocols than they had on the 2013 NeSA-R after the implementation of traditional reading instruction. Further research is needed to explore the impact of Guided Reading on students at higher intermediate grade levels. As students get older, it becomes more difficult to remedy reading problems. The students in Cohort 3 have been exposed to the research district's traditional practices longer than any other students in the study. Is Guided Reading an appropriate instructional practice for students at higher intermediate grade levels? This is a question that requires further investigation. Subsequent research on this group of students could also focus on motivation to read and reading stamina.

Implications for Practice

The results of this study verify Guided Reading as an essential component to any core reading program. Guided Reading instruction address all five of the Five Pillars of Reading Instruction recommended by the National Reading Panel, phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (NRP, 2000). The role of the teacher cannot be understated in Guided Reading instruction. To ensure the success of the new Guided Reading protocol implementation beyond the first year, continued professional

development to support teacher practice is paramount. In Ruddell and Unrau's constructivist perspective on reading development, they denote the importance of the teacher in establishing an environment that allows a student to construct meaning from the text they read. In Guided Reading, teachers serve as coaches of readers where it is less about teaching text content and more about teaching strategies to students. Patricia Antonacci (2000) states, "Rather than transmitting knowledge that the teacher processes, students construct their own knowledge through transactions about the text where language is an important tool in learning" (p. 25). Teachers need to be able to offer the appropriate teaching strategies that will foster the students' own ability to make meaning from text. This skill, in both teachers and students, is developed over time. It is essential for professional development to continue to support teachers in this development. As Fountas and Pinnell state, "Through specific teaching and careful text selection, you [teachers] make it possible for students to learn more than they could on their own" (2001, p. 191).

Guided Reading offers small-group instruction where a teacher can provide specifically what students' need rather than spend time on whole-class drills that are too hard or too easy for students (Hattie, 2009; Iaquina, 2006; Scharer et al., 2005). Small-group instruction is used to provide a more favorable student to teacher ratio when teaching students skills and strategies, especially in reading. As previously stated, the goal of Guided Reading is to support students in their process to become independent readers. Meeting in small groups provides teachers with the opportunity to tailor instruction for a group, and sometimes, individual basis. Through small-group instruction, teachers can learn more about their students as readers and attend to their

needs in a more efficient and effective way. Great care must be taken to ensure manageable teacher-to-student ratios exist in order for teachers to provide the specific small-group instruction required of Guided Reading.

The types of reading materials students are exposed to during Guided Reading are critical to that student's development as a reader. In Guided Reading, a student's Instructional reading level represents his or her Zone of Proximal Development. The Zone of Proximal Development denotes the area in which a student has not mastered certain tasks, but can accomplish them with the support of a teacher. In the instructional level, text offers a minimum of new things to learn, providing students with the opportunity to construct meaning of the text by reading with high levels of accuracy, fluency, and comprehension (Allington, 2013; Antonacci, 2000; Cox & Hopkins, 2006; Pikulski, 2004). As students' problem solving skills increase, the difficulty and demand of the instructional text should also increase along a gradient of text, such as the Fountas & Pinnell Text Level Gradient. Appropriate instructional materials to match instructional needs are a necessity for any district implementing Guided Reading.

The success of Guided Reading is not possible without the use of flexible grouping, which is made possible by frequent progress monitoring. Flexible grouping offers students exposure to different texts, a critical component of learning to read (Allington, 2013; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Hattie, 2009). Historically, static grouping practices have prevented students, especially those with greater reading support needs, from gaining exposure to a variety of text. Students requiring greater reading support only experience one type of text difficulty in static groups - low. Students involved in

flexible grouping strategies gain access to more difficult and varied text as they progress from one level to the next.

Another significant reason why students do not flexibly move to different groups is a lack of systematic observation of student reading (Clay, 1993; Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). Dylan Wiliam (2014) suggests, “Assessment is the bridge between teaching and learning.” In order to ensure students are moving to a new reading group when the time is appropriate, continued professional development must be given on the topic of progress monitoring, specifically Running Records. Teachers must be able to accurately interpret the data gathered during a Running Record to monitor student reading progress. In addition to providing feedback to teachers on how students are progressing, Running Records provide feedback to the teacher on the effectiveness of his or her own instruction.

Implications for Policy

Improving reading proficiency in elementary students benefits society as a whole. As early as 1978, research began to suggest that grade 3 reading achievement is a characteristic that differentiates dropouts from graduates (Lloyd, 1978, p. 1197). In 2012, Donald Hernandez with The Annie E. Casey Foundation in *Double Jeopardy: How Third-Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation* states, “Students who do not read proficiently by third grade are four times more likely to leave school without a diploma than proficient readers” (p. 4). Student success in school, and beyond, is inextricably linked to a student’s ability to read. No greater cause exists for school districts than to promote instructional practices that improve student reading achievement.

Enhancing, and sometimes beginning, Guided Reading instruction in the research district was necessary to improve student reading achievement. Through this process, the research district identified a number of essential components for a successful implementation of Guided Reading. Identifying these components will now allow the research district to isolate specific components and provide professional development germane to those areas. Identifying the effective Guided Reading components also provides a replicable model for other school districts interested in enhancing or beginning Guided Reading instruction.

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