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# Reading Workshop Conferences: Effect on First Grade Student Reading Ability

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*RUNNING HEAD:* Reading Workshop Conferences

Reading Workshop Conferences:  
Effect on First Grade Student Reading Ability

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Science in Education

School of Education and Counseling Psychology

Dominican University of California

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## Signature Sheet

This thesis, written under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor and approved by the Chair of the Master's program, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

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### Abstract

Reading workshop is a way to structure a literacy block during the school day that allows for differentiation and a high level of student engagement in the process of learning to read. During reading workshop, students read independently and with partners at their independent reading levels while the teacher confers with students and leads small groups. During conferences, the teacher differentiates instruction and tailors lessons to individual student needs.

The purpose of this study is to examine the result of individualized lessons on word attack strategies on first grade students' reading ability. Word attack strategies, as in strategies for decoding unfamiliar words, are a crucial component of learning how to read fluently. Students who lack word attack strategies may struggle with reading and do not progress at their expected rate of development.

This is an evaluation research study using a qualitative analysis of student data as collected by the teacher as researcher. Observational notes and running records were used to collect data on a class of 19 first graders aged 6-8 as participants. Results indicated that all students made progress as readers, with 84% of participants reading at or above the grade-level benchmark at the end of the data collection period. Additionally, 100% of participants showed growth in reading comprehension and word attack strategy skills.

Keywords: Reading workshop, conferences, word attack strategy skills, first grade



### Chapter 1 Reading Workshop Conferences

Reading has been a love of mine since childhood and remains my favorite hobby. As a new teacher, teaching first grade seemed a daunting undertaking, the responsibility of teaching students to read weighed heavily on my mind. Over the past three years, I discovered that first grade is where the magic happens reading-wise, and I have come to love teaching students to read. It is incredible to watch the “light bulb” turn on as students begin slowly to recognize words, then take off as readers. Reading is my favorite part of teaching first grade, and it helps that I also love children’s literature, reading aloud, and the joy kids feel from listening to people read to them.

Reading workshop has been a daily part of classroom practice since my first year of teaching three years ago, when my district began providing professional development on reading and writing workshop. After transitioning to a workshop model it was clear that this model supports students as individual learners and provides them the time and guidance they need in order to become proficient readers.

Questions for this study are as follows. What is the effect of one-on-one conferences on improving students’ word attack skills? How does one-on-one conferencing impact word reading accuracy?

#### Statement of Problem

Decoding unfamiliar words is a difficult area for beginning readers because of the high level of spelling irregularity in the English language. Beginning readers require a wide variety of strategies they can apply during active reading in order to grow as readers. The problem is that children’s reading levels are quite varied throughout first grade, ranging from beginning to

advanced, and whole-class lessons are not the most effective way to deliver information. Differentiation of instruction is an efficient way to target students' individual needs when teaching word attack skills.

### Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of individual reading workshop conferences on students' reading ability. Reading workshop provides teachers with valuable time to confer one-on-one with students, and this study examines the effect of these conferences and determines their effectiveness in improving the reading skills of students.

### Research Questions

How can reading workshop conferences improve first grade students' reading ability? How can teachers use conferences during reading workshop to differentiate instruction and improve students' word attack skills and reading ability? What is the effect of reading workshop conferences on students' word attack skills?

### Theoretical Rationale

Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development provides theoretical rationale for this study. Doolittle (1997) cites Vygotsky when he explains, an individual's immediate potential for cognitive growth is limited on the lower end by that which he or she can accomplish independently, and on the upper end by that which he or she can accomplish with the help of a more knowledgeable other such as a peer, tutor, or teacher. This region of

immediate potential for cognitive growth between the upper and lower limits is the zone of proximal development (p. 85).

Vygotsky theorized that children learn best when working within their zone of proximal development. The zone of proximal development theory speaks to reading workshop because students require instruction that will bring them into their zone of proximal development in order for them to become proficient readers. Students vary greatly in their strengths and needs, so differentiation is an effective method of providing each student what he or she needs in order to work within the zone of proximal development.

During reading workshop, students spend time reading books at their independent reading levels where they can practice strategies taught in whole-group “minilessons” while the teacher confers with individuals. During conferences, the teacher determines a skill or strategy the student would benefit from practicing, provides explicit teaching to the student, and then monitors as the student implements the new skill or strategy. It is this work during reading workshop that allows students to grow and become proficient readers. According to Doolittle, “A student’s development is based on activities that stimulate the student within his or her zone of proximal development. Effective teaching consists of presenting these activities, stimulating the student within his or her zone of proximal development, and then providing the resources necessary for the student to succeed, achieve, and develop” (p. 89). Reading workshop provides a perfect environment for such work.

### Assumptions

Conferring and individualized instruction improves students’ reading abilities. Spending time teaching strategies to and working with individual students provides the teacher with

valuable data about the strengths and areas for growth of each student. One can plan lessons based on formative and summative assessment data collected frequently.

### Background and Need

Keene and Zimmerman (1997) present research that confirms the idea that explicit teaching of reading comprehension strategies leads to growth in students' reading ability. The authors describe research in which it was found that proficient readers use seven or eight thinking strategies: using prior knowledge while reading, determining big ideas within text, visualizing text, asking questions while reading, making inferences, retelling or summarizing, and using strategies to ensure one is understanding what is read, such as going back to reread, skipping ahead and coming back to a confusing portion, using context clues, etc. According to the authors, "Teaching children which thinking strategies are used by proficient readers and helping them use those strategies independently creates the core of teaching reading. If proficient readers routinely use certain thinking strategies, those are the strategies children must be taught" (p. 53).

After a discussion of implementation of each strategy, the authors include an appendix in which they cite research they collected on this topic. This research was conducted from 1994-1995 to "assess the effect of intensive staff development in reading comprehension strategy instruction" (p. 237) in several schools. One set of teachers received professional development over a three-year period and taught reading comprehension strategies in their classes. The second set of teachers did not receive professional development and served as the control group. One hundred nineteen students were assessed ranging from grades 2-5, 60 of which were in the first group and 59 students were in the control group. The assessment used was the Reading Project's Major Point Interview, which measures the usage of the eight proficient reader strategies, and the

Flynt/Cooter informal reading inventory was used to assess students' ability to retell a story. Students were assessed individually with the Reading Project's Major Point Interview twice, once in the fall of 1994 and once in the spring of 1995. The researchers found that the children in the first group showed

...significantly greater gains than children in the nonintervention classrooms. The gains held across different ethnic groups illustrates that reading comprehension strategy instruction is a powerful intervention with children of all backgrounds and abilities, and that staff development in reading correlates to higher achievement for students (p. 241).

Keene and Zimmerman argue, therefore, that a critical element of reading instruction must be strategy instruction in these 8 comprehension strategies. They ask, "If we know that thinking about our own thinking and using the strategies that form this metacognitive foundation are associated with the tendency to read more deeply, critically, analytically, and independently, shouldn't comprehension strategy instruction be a major focus of our work with children who are learning to read and reading to learn?" (p. 43).

## Summary

Implementing reading workshop may lead to positive results on students' reading abilities and attitudes towards reading, as suggested by the research literature. Differentiated instruction is an effective method for meeting the needs of all students, because each student needs something different, and this approach captures Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development. Teachers who differentiate are able to assess students on a regular basis and have a deep knowledge of their students' abilities and gaps in learning. Classrooms that use reading workshop provide time for teachers to work individually or in small groups. The

following is a review of the literature on implementing reading workshop, the benefits of working in a workshop model, and differentiation of instruction.

## Chapter 2 Review of the Literature

### Introduction

This section is an examination of the research literature on reading workshop. Information was gathered from academic library searches using online resources. Research information is organized in the following categories: Historical Context and Review of the Academic Research.

### Historical Context

Lucy Calkins and her colleagues were instrumental in the development of reading workshop. Calkins and her mentor, Donald Graves, first created writing workshop, where students are taught to plan, draft, write, and revise the way adult authors do. This method of teaching writing came from a lack of instruction in the craft of writing within American schools. Calkins took her work with writing workshop to the Teachers College, where she and her colleagues developed reading workshop as a complement to writing workshop. The faculty members at the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project have been instrumental in implementing reading and writing workshop in schools throughout the country and have written K-5 curriculum for use in classrooms.

### Review of Academic Research

#### *Reading Workshop: Procedures and Implementation*

Reading workshop is an instructional method in which students spend a large portion of the literacy block reading at their independent reading levels while the teacher leads small groups

and confers with individuals. Dade and Storey (2011) describe reading workshop as an approach involving “long periods of independent reading time, scholarly discussion between students and teachers, and students who read books of their choosing at appropriate levels” (p. 5). Reading workshop usually follows a predictable structure. To begin, teachers lead a whole-class minilesson where they instruct students on a skill or strategy. Students then read independently, which, according to Calkins (2001), “is when we confer, lead guided reading groups, and do strategy lessons” (p. 66). Students often have time to read with a partner during reading workshop as well, and the block typically closes with some type of share or link to the learning. This structure is typically used in both reading and writing workshops.

The minilesson is a whole-group lesson where a skill is explicitly taught and practiced. Students then read independently at their independent reading levels while the teacher confers with students and leads small group lessons. The independent reading time, according to Calkins,

...is the most important part of the reading workshop. When we teach reading, we are teaching children to do something. Children can't learn to swim without swimming, to write without writing, to sing without singing, or to read without reading. If all we did in the independent reading workshop was to create a structure to ensure that every child spent extended time engaged in reading appropriate texts, we would have supported readers more efficiently and more effectively than we could through any elaborate plan, beautiful ditto sheet, or brilliant lecture (p. 68).

Feinberg (2007) describes Calkins as a literacy guru and one of the “original architects of the ‘workshop’ approach to teaching writing to children” (p. 27). Feinberg explains that Calkins’



approach was influenced by her mentor Donald Graves, who set out to make students more “conscious of what successful adult writers do – draft ideas, revise, edit, and publish” (p. 27). Calkins has taken this approach and become quite famous as an educator and author, particularly in New York, where her Teachers College Reading and Writing Project serves thousands of students.

Reading workshop procedures can be contained within a Daily 5 model, which is a way to structure the language arts block in an elementary classroom where students are engaged in meaningful reading and writing activities and teachers can differentiate instruction to meet the needs of small groups or individuals. Bouchey and Moser (2012), the creators of the Daily 5 model, suggest that during the language arts block teachers “deliver two or three whole-group lessons, teach two or three small groups daily, and confer with 6-12 individual students daily” (p. 172).

The Daily 5 structure includes whole-group instruction for short periods of time, about 10 minutes, followed by periods of student choice. Students choose the order in which they read independently, read with a partner, listen to reading, write, or complete word work. According to the authors, “Because students are motivated, engaged, and highly independent with their Daily 5 choice, the teacher in turn uses the entire block of time to assess, lead a small-group lesson consisting of two or three students, or conduct individual conferences” (p. 173).

Both the traditional reading workshop model and the Daily 5 model rely on students working independently during the language arts block to allow the teacher time to meet with groups and individuals. In the early stages of the school year, teachers must provide direct instruction in the desired behaviors of the literacy block, and provide time for students to see these behaviors modeled and practice them as well. Teachers also must provide time for students

to build their reading and writing stamina at the beginning of the year so they can sustain their focus and continue to be engaged while the teacher does the essential work of conferring and meeting with groups. Both Daily 5 and reading workshop allow time for teachers to confer and teach small groups, and provide time for students to become stronger readers, writers, and spellers.

There is a great deal of pressure placed on many students to perform well on standardized tests, which can leave teachers feeling that there is not enough time during the day to provide independent reading time. Miller and Higgins (2008) assert that in many cases, students spend little to no time reading at school, though it is known that “to become proficient readers, students must read every day” (p. 125). Ivey (as cited in Miller & Higgins, 2008) explains that “Giving all students, especially those experiencing difficulty, more time to read in school is the most certain way to help all students become more skilled and engaged, and even to be more prepared to achieve on standardized tests” (p. 125). Students who engage in reading activities during the school day perform better on standardized tests than students who do not, so teachers looking to improve students’ reading test scores would do well to increase the amount of time students spend reading during the school day.

Reading workshop is one way to support adolescent students who are emergent or struggling readers. Taylor and Nesheim (2000) discuss the difficulty of being a secondary student who struggles with reading. One way to support these emergent readers, according to the authors, is to implement reading workshop. Reading workshop provides a way for students to read books at their independent reading levels during the school day and have lessons that are specifically tailored towards their needs taught to them either individually or in small groups. The authors recommend a focus on children’s literature, in which students practice reading

children's books aloud in preparation for reading to young children, such as siblings or students at a nearby elementary school. This gives the students a reason to focus on revisiting "kid's books," while honoring students' current reading levels. This can also help emergent readers make connections to texts and revisit their early memories of reading.

Taylor and Nesheim recommend instituting reading workshop in secondary classrooms because struggling readers "must learn strategies and have significant amounts of time to practice these strategies with self-selected materials" (p. 48). The combination of direct, focused lessons on reading strategies plus time to practice reading books at an appropriate reading level can help improve not only students' reading ability, but also students' attitudes about reading in general.

Gulla (2012) reported on an ethnographic study in which she described a ninth grade literacy classroom in a vocational high school in the Bronx, New York, where reading workshop was utilized to improve students' reading ability. Prior to participating in this particular class, many of the students "had never finished a book before this school year" (p. 59). Reading workshop allowed this secondary teacher to spark her students' interest in reading and support them as beginning or struggling readers. In a high school setting, readers are able to participate in conversations about books, a "lively cross between book club and workshop" (p. 59).

Conferences can be used in secondary classrooms as well to set goals with students and explain clearly what students need to do to improve as readers.

Lausé (2004) reported on her experience creating a reading and writing workshop curriculum in her ninth and tenth grade high school classes in New Orleans. Lausé created a curriculum inspired by Nancie Atwell in which she differentiated by student choice. She conducted a survey at the beginning of the year where students recorded their favorite books, and

then she recommended books based on their interests. Lausé asserts that her students' growth throughout the school year was evident by their reading rate and reading comprehension, and, most importantly, in their attitudes about reading and about themselves as readers.

Mounla, Bahous, and Nabhani (2011) report on their study of students in a first grade classroom in Beirut, Lebanon, that uses an American curriculum. The study examined the effect of reading workshop on reading comprehension skills and reading levels. In this study, reading workshop was implemented in a class of 18 first graders, and the researchers kept running records, recorded their observations, and conducted interviews to collect data. Students' reading levels were assessed using the Teacher's College Reading and Writing Project running records. Students were placed into one of three groups based on their results:

1. needs support, 12 students
2. meets standards, 5 students
3. exceeds standards, 1 student

Three students, one from each group, were selected at random to be highlighted in the article.

Reading workshop was implemented in October, and took place for 60 minutes every day. The reading workshop block utilized the traditional structure: minilesson, independent reading while the teacher conferred with students individually, and reading share. During conferences, the students were observed while reading, then given direct feedback and taught or retaught a skill. Goals were set during conferences, which gave the students clear information about what to practice, and the teacher was able to assess mastery through running records and observations. Throughout the year, students were taught expected behaviors for reading workshop, how to self-select "just-right" books, how to decode unfamiliar words, and many reading comprehension strategies such as predicting, visualizing, rereading, and analyzing

character traits. In June, new running records were administered to the class to determine their progress and assess their growth.

All three focus students made great progress in reading by the end of the year. Student A went from reading at an A level to a K level, below benchmark to meeting standards, student B went from D to N, at grade level to exceeding standards, and student C went from Q to U, exceeding standards. All three students learned to successfully use a variety of reading strategies throughout the year. The study found that students' reading levels and comprehension improved from the use of reading workshop, and they credit the students' growth to the use of differentiated instruction tailored to each student's individual learning needs.

A weakness of this study was that it took place among only one group of students. A possible next step might include implementing reading workshop among a broader group, for example, many classes across several schools.

### *Conferring*

Conferring is one way teachers differentiate instruction during reading workshop. Conferring, according to Dade and Storey, (2011) "allows teachers the opportunity to work with students and to reach each child's individual needs. Only in individual conferences are teachers able to specifically identify the needs of a student, thus assisting the student in becoming more independent" (p. 8). During conferences, teachers listen to students as they read and assess whether they are using strategies taught in previous lessons or conferences, and then explicitly teach a skill or strategy. The teacher creates a record of each conference in order to note what each student was taught and to track student progress over time. Boushey and Moser (2012) find that short, direct conferences help students to make "strong progress in becoming more proficient readers" (p. 177).

Conferences typically take place while students are reading independently. Conferences may include lessons around a topic studied by the class, such as reading informational text or participating in book talks, or can be based on data collected about a student. The advantage of individual conferences is that teachers are able to meet students' needs and address their areas of concern. According to Allen, (2009) "Sitting shoulder-to-shoulder provides a perfect situation for delving into a reader's thinking and helping him describe his metacognitive stance. Looking into a reader's eyes and listening can provide the most intensive, yet unobtrusive, way to uncover specific characteristics of the reader's process" (p. 15).

Allen recommends breaking conferences into three sections, the first including a review section, where the teacher examines what a student is doing well and what he or she can work on. Allen recommends asking open-ended questions of the reader at this time, such as, "What are you working on today?" During this time the teacher can also review previous goals with the student and check in with their progress towards goals. During the first portion of the conference the teacher may ask the student to read aloud for a few pages to give the teacher a little insight into the student's reading. This first part of the conference, according to Allen, is "a way of easing into a conversation. It is a means to discover what the reader is thinking, pondering, or discovering. I want to discover what is going on in the reader's process. I also want to get a flavor for how he or she uses a strategy or skill that we have discussed in either a whole-group crafting session, a small-group setting, or during a previous conference" (p. 99).

The second portion of the conference is the instruction portion, where the teacher explicitly teaches a skill or strategy based on the research that took place in the first part of the conference. Allen recommends teachers keep a record of the instruction that takes place at this point in the conference to use as a reference for future conferences.

The final section of the conference involves the teacher and/or student creating a learning goal for the student to focus on. These plans “will gradually move the reader forward until our next conference” (p. 102).

Calkins (2001) describes several different types of conferences that can take place during reading workshop. The first is a “research, decide, teach” style conference, where the teacher first listens to the student read to determine a strategy to teach, then decides what to teach and then teaches “in a way that can influence what that child does on another day with another book” (p. 102). During these conferences, the teacher listens as the student reads, explicitly teaches a skill or strategy, then listens again as the student attempts to implement it. Calkins recommends teachers record notes during conferences so the teacher can refer to them the next time he or she meets with the student and can monitor student progress.

The next type of conference Calkins recommends is a coaching conference. Coaching conferences begin with an observation of a reader, but it can be an observation made in a previous conference. These conferences can be used as check-ins from a previous meeting to see how a student is faring using a new strategy or tool. “In coaching, we intervene as lightly as we can while readers continue to move through the text ... always the goal is to intervene just enough to scaffold the reading work we hope will happen” (p. 112). The goal of coaching is to “help readers develop unconscious habits” (p. 112).

The third type of conference is a proficient partner conference. Proficient partner conferences involve the teacher modeling good reading habits and behaviors right alongside the student. According to Calkins, “In the back and forth of our work with this child, we shift between demonstrating the kind of reading we hope this child is stretching toward, allowing her to join us at this level, then again showing her the sort of reading we hope she is stretching

toward, and then again allowing her to participate” (p. 116). The goal of these conferences is to scaffold and provide instruction in order to “raise the level of what that child would do alone” (p. 115).

Porath (2014) conducted an observational study of one teacher as she learned to be more student-centered during reading workshop conferences. The teacher was observed during a nine-month case study of two third grade teachers implementing a reading workshop approach in their classrooms. The author observed the teacher as she conferred with 5 focus students. For the study, conferences with the same student were examined from the beginning of the study and the end of the study.

The researcher and teacher met to reflect on conferences after each observation. After the first conference, the teacher and the researcher reflected that the teacher dominated the conference, so the teacher decided to “adjust her conference strategies to provide more space for student response and less teacher-talk” (p. 629). In the next conference, the teacher asked more questions of the student, providing the student with an opportunity to be an active participant in the conference. Greater response from the student allowed the teacher to gain a deeper understanding of the student’s reading ability.

The teacher began opening her conferences with questions such as, “Why did you choose this book?” allowing her to see the student’s thought processes and get to know their book preferences. The teacher was then able to use the student’s responses to ask questions about comprehension. The teacher asked the student to read aloud from her favorite part of the book, and then asked questions about the book in the moment. Asking the student to read her favorite part allowed her to have some choice in what she was learning.



The one-on-one conference environment allowed the student to confide in the teacher a difficulty she was having with her parents at home around reading. The teacher was able to spend time strategizing with the student ways to address the problem, therefore allowing the student to make sure that her needs were met at school and at home and also strengthening the relationship between student and teacher.

Porath cites Combs to explain that during reading conferences, “the teacher’s primary purpose is to listen to what students can teach you about the way they think and make meaning. You may focus the talk or probe for more information, but you cannot learn from them unless you listen” (Combs as cited in Porath 2014, p. 633). As the teacher improved her conferencing skills, she provided space for the student to lead the conference and provided time for her to listen to the student, which allowed her to gain knowledge about that child as a reader. The author asserts that “This evolution provided more authentic student responses, better awareness of the students’ needs, and deeper conversations about books with the student” (p. 627).

### *Record Keeping and Assessment*

When assessing students, Boushey and Moser (2012) determine students’ strengths and areas of need using a diagnostic assessment tool (a specific tool is not suggested by the authors). The findings are shared with the student, and strengths are celebrated and areas of need are communicated. The student and teacher together create a goal and discuss strategies that will help the student meet the goal. These assessments can be used to guide small group or individual instruction.

Allen (2009) recommends keeping records of conferences, and states that “Effective reading conferences can provide specific and anecdotal documentation of a reader’s strengths and growth areas. Our records serve as a source of how well a reader is responding to

interventions we may provide” (p. 16). Allen uses conferencing notes to track student progress, and states that “conferring notes are as useful and powerful as more formal assessments in documenting specific growth in reading. If we use conferring notes wisely, we have strong and worthy evidence of how a reader changes over time and becomes more proficient” (p. 112).

### *Differentiation of Instruction*

Differentiation is a way to address student needs on an individualized basis.

Differentiation is necessary in the elementary classroom because all students vary greatly in their abilities. The key element of differentiated instruction, according to Watts-Taffe et al (2012), is knowing one’s students, and matching students to teaching and practices that meet their needs. Differentiated instruction is also a way to honor the diversity of the classroom – the learning styles of students of all abilities and from all walks of life are honored. Differentiation saw an increase in popularity after the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) and the introduction of Response to Intervention (RTI). According to the authors, “Because every child learns differently, and every child *is* different, the most effective instruction is designed to fit each learner” (p. 305).

Tomlinson (2000) asserts that teachers maximize student benefit if they differentiate, and cites differentiation as a way expert teachers provide the best learning experience for their students. According to Tomlinson, “At its most basic level, differentiation consists of the efforts of teachers to respond to variance among learners in the classroom. Whenever a teacher reaches out to an individual or small group to vary his or her teaching in order to create the best learning experience possible, that teacher is differentiating instruction” (p. 2).

Differentiation can be achieved by adapting four different elements: differing the content, process, products, and/or learning environment. Differentiating content can include providing content at a variety of reading levels, giving students access to materials on tape, and meeting with small groups to reteach or reinforce skills. Differentiating the process includes providing choice for learners, so students are exploring a topic through a lens that interests them, and varying the amount of time students have to complete a task. Differentiation of products includes giving students options for presenting their knowledge such as writing a paper, creating a presentation, and so on. Differentiation of the learning environment includes providing different spaces for students to choose from to work within the classroom such as sitting, standing, or reclining.

According to Tomlinson, “There is no recipe for differentiation. Rather, it is a way of thinking about teaching and learning that values the individual and can be translated into classroom practice in many ways” (p. 4). To best serve students through differentiation, teachers should: use ongoing assessments to inform teaching; provide interesting, meaningful work for all students, regardless of skill level; and allow for flexible groupings so all students work with a variety of peers, including both students at similar and different levels of performance. Tomlinson asserts that teachers should view differentiation as an ongoing process that can always be changed and made better. Teachers should develop routines that allow students to work in flexible groups while the teacher provides one-on-one or small group instruction. Teachers should also monitor and assess students on a very regular basis to be sure each student is served appropriately.

Campbell (2009) advocates for a To-With-By model of differentiation, where the teacher explicitly teaches a skill, students and the teacher practice it together, then students practice it on

their own. According to Campbell, “The *To-With-By* approach provides the necessary scaffolding for both young children leaning to read and older students working with more difficult text so they can all be successful learners who understand what they read” (p. 9). Using a model such as the *To-With-By* model allows teachers to differentiate the curriculum, instruction, and/or assessment for their students as needed.

Guided reading is one way teachers can differentiate reading instruction. Fountas and Pinnell (2012) assert that the practice of guided reading “provides the small-group instruction that allows for a closer tailoring to individual strengths and needs” (p. 281). Typically, guided reading is taught to a small group of students and involves students reading a book and then discussing it with the teacher. The teacher provides explicit instruction to small groups depending on what they need. Guided reading lessons usually involve texts that are slightly more difficult than what students can read on their own, because, according to the authors, “it is vital to support students in taking on more challenging texts so that they can grow as readers” (p. 269).

To successfully implement guided reading, Fountas and Pinnell recommend teachers have a large variety of books that are leveled according to ability; provide time for students to work independently in order to give teachers the opportunity to meet with small groups; administer assessments to determine students’ reading levels; and focus on comprehension as a major goal of reading ability. Fountas and Pinnell advocate for small-group teaching, as it allows teachers to get to know the needs and abilities of each student and tailor teaching for each student.

The authors recommend that teachers use flexible groupings based on student progress. This requires that teachers be constantly assessing their students to learn where they are making

mistakes and where they need support. To take on this challenge teachers should use running records as a way to track student performance.

Tobin and McInnes (2008) report on a study of 10 second and third grade classrooms in a small city in Canada. The teachers in this study were provided professional development on implementing differentiated instruction in their classrooms, and were then observed as part of the study. Lessons were videotaped, teachers were interviewed, and student assessments were reviewed as part of the study as well. Two teachers were highlighted as a focus in this article. Both teachers implemented differentiation strategies in their classrooms, including different books in “book bundles” for students to read during the literacy block, student choice in how to respond to books, literacy centers, and guided reading lessons. According to the authors,

...At the heart of differentiating instruction in language arts is the need to provide learners with choices about what they read and to design their work products so that they are a better match for learners. This is particularly important for struggling students who can most benefit from additional supports, tailored activities and explicit and extended instructional time with the teacher (p. 3).

The authors describe struggling students as students who are learning disabled, English Language Learners, and/or students who lack a background in reading. The article discusses many of the ways teachers participating in the study differentiated for their students, and highlights the importance of doing so.

A weakness of this article is that the authors do not provide data on student performance. The authors did not report on student data before and after the implementation of the

differentiation strategies, so it is unclear whether or not the students benefitted from the implementation of the strategies.

In a study conducted by Connor, Morrison, Fishman, Giuliani, Luck, Underwood, Bayraktar, Crowe, and Schatschneider, (2011), the research team examined why more than 70% of students “reach fourth grade unable to read and comprehend text at or above proficient levels” (p. 189). The research team conducted a field experiment in which students and teachers were selected randomly to participate in one of two interventions, one using differentiated reading instruction, and the other using a vocabulary intervention program that was not differentiated. To obtain data, the researchers used the Woodcock-Johnson III Comprehension assessment and the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests comprehension task. The researchers decided to examine comprehension and vocabulary because “The link between vocabulary and reading comprehension has been documented for over two decades, and correlational studies have shown a positive association between students’ vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension outcomes” (p. 192).

Teachers selected to participate in the individualized instruction group were provided professional development where they learned to use flexible learning groups that were comprised of students of like ability, and to provide instruction in small groups based on students’ skills and needs. The teachers in the vocabulary group were not instructed to use small groups, though they were not prohibited from doing so. Both intervention groups took place during the regular 90-minute literacy portion of the school day and were provided by the general education teacher during the 2008-2009 school year. A total of 33 teachers and 448 third grade students at 7 schools participated in the study, all located in the southeastern United States. The population of students included suburban, urban, and rural communities. All the teachers participating in the

study used the Open Court Reading program as their literacy curriculum. In addition to assessing students, the researchers conducted observations in each classroom and videotaped lessons during the fall, winter, and spring.

In the individual student intervention group, students were assessed three times during the year on vocabulary, word reading, and comprehension. The assessment data were analyzed and teachers were given recommendations for the amount of time to spend in small groups with each student dependent on their comprehension scores. Teachers participated in professional development on the use of differentiated instruction and were supported throughout the year by mentor teachers. Teachers were trained in using assessment data to guide instruction, planning lessons, and classroom management. The researchers believed they would find that students in the individualized student instruction group would show greater gains in their reading comprehension.

The vocabulary group focused on providing effective vocabulary instruction to build comprehension skills. This intervention was selected because the researchers believed it would support students' comprehension, and it was not a differentiated program. Teachers used the book *Bringing Words to Life* by McKeown and Kucan and met monthly to discuss it and design lessons.

The researchers found that “Across the conditions, students generally made grade-appropriate gains in reading comprehension from fall to spring” (p. 201), however students who received instruction in the individualized student instruction group demonstrated significantly greater gains on the reading comprehension assessment. Additionally, teachers who had received professional development on implementing differentiated groups during the literacy block were

more likely than the teachers in the vocabulary group to provide small-group individualized instruction.

### *Writing Workshop*

Writing workshop is very similar in structure and purpose to reading workshop. Students are provided a block of time during the school day to practice writing, during which the teacher holds small group and individual conferences based on student need.

Writing workshop utilizes conferences as the main way for teachers to differentiate instruction. Calkins, Hartman, and White (2005) recommend that conferences take on a reliable structure consisting of four parts: research, decide, teach, and link.

In the research section of the conference, the teacher observes and interviews the student in order to “understand what the child is trying to do as a writer” (p. 7). The teacher asks questions and probes to learn more, for example, “What have you been working on lately?” “How is it going?” about the student as a writer. At this stage in the conference, the teacher points out what the student is doing well and gives him or her a compliment. Pointing out student success, according Calkins, Hartman, and White, will result in conferences being “more successful and meaningful” (p. 9). The teacher also uses the research stage to find something the child would benefit from learning or practicing, something that will lift the level of what the student is already doing. “During the research phase of a conference, we try to understand what the child is already doing and is trying to do as a writer, and what the child can almost but not quite do” (p. 45). This phase needs to be short and to the point in order to maximize the conference.



The next section of a conference is the “decide” section, in which the teacher decides what to teach and how to teach it. Calkins, Hartman, and White recommend teaching into what the student is already doing, that way the student remains engaged and the teacher can lift the level of what the student is able to do independently. The authors recommend teaching “into the child’s own intentions. That is, if a student tells you that he or she is trying to do something (to add details, to write a good lead, etc.), try to find a way to teach toward *that goal* rather than taking the writer to yet another goal” (p. 71). The teacher should document the skill or strategy taught during this stage of the conference to refer to in subsequent conferences and track student progress over time.

The third section of a writing conference is the teach section, in which the teacher explicitly teaches a skill. Skills can be taught in one of three ways, either through guided practice, demonstration, or explicitly telling or showing an example. Demonstration is a very common method of instruction for writing conferences, where the teacher shows the student “exactly what we mean for her to do later on her own” (p. 12). Guided practice is used “to scaffold the child as, with our support, she tries what we hope she will soon be able to do on her own” (p. 13). During these types of conferences, the teacher models or teaches, and then provides time for the student to practice the new skill or strategy while the teacher coaches. Conferences are direct and explicit, the teacher presents information, then the student is given time to practice the new skill while the teacher observes and provides feedback. Regardless of the teaching that takes place, “the most important part of our teaching occurs when we stop teaching and say to the child, ‘Now you try it.’” (p. 14).

The final section of a conference is the link, where what was taught is recapped and summarized. The teacher names what he or she taught and reminds the student to use this skill as

she writes. Once the teacher feels that the concept or skill has been internalized and the student can continue to practice it independently, the teacher provides the link in order to summarize or reiterate what was taught in the conference.

The authors describe three different types of conferences: content conferences, expectations conferences, and process and goals conferences. Content conferences are used to draw the writer's ideas out to encourage him or her to write more or add details to the work he or she is doing. Expectation conferences are behavioral conferences that are used to reinforce the expected behaviors of the writing workshop. Process and goals conferences are used to teach skills and lift the level of student writing.

One major challenge of holding one-on-one conferences with students is managing the rest of the class. The authors recommend setting up predictable structures for reading and writing workshops that allow students to work independently and for a sustained amount of time. This involves explicit teaching of how to move through the writing process. The authors hold students to very high expectations, asserting that "Before the first three weeks of the school year are over, almost every child can learn to cycle through the entire writing process independently. That is, by the end of September, almost every child should be able to choose his or her subject, plan the writing, write, and then revise by adding more information without needing to check in with the teacher" (p. 19).

This of course takes practice, so the procedures of writing workshop are explicitly taught and modeled, and students practice every day. If needed, teachers also hold expectation conferences where students are retaught the expected behaviors for writing workshop. It is crucial, claim the authors, to teach children to get started right away without individual check-ins from the teacher. Also important is to teach students what to do when they finish. This kind of

self-sustaining work will allow the teacher time to work with students individually without having to constantly manage the behaviors of the group. Calkins, Hartman, and White assert that “The truth of the matter is that the best way to support children learning to do more with some independence is through conferences. And we can’t conduct writing conferences unless kids can carry on independently, cycling through the writing process” (p. 26).

In a year-long study of writing instruction, Jones (2015) set out to examine how two current methods of writing instruction, writing workshop and interactive writing, effect kindergarten students’ development of foundational and compositional writing skills. Jones was looking for ability in “foundational skills of writing (transcription, print conventions, alphabets, sentence production, simple punctuation), and the compositional skills of writing (purposes of writing, forms, functions)” (p. 34).

Jones describes writing workshop as a period of time during the school day where students are taught strategies and techniques of writing during minilessons, then given time to practice independently while the teacher conducts writing conferences. Interactive writing is described as a “group experience that increases children’s participation in the act of writing and helps them attend to the details of letters, sounds, and words while working together on meaningful text” (Pinnell & Fountas, 1998, p. 29, as cited in Jones, 2015, p. 36). Interactive writing consists of the teacher and students working together to create shared texts. The teacher explicitly teaches writing skills and strategies, and then the whole class works together to create a piece of writing.

For the study, six kindergarten classes consisting of 112 students in total, 59 male and 53 female, were examined. The study took place at two schools within one school district in a western city in Utah. The study involved three groups, one group utilizing writing workshop, one

utilizing interactive writing, and one control writing group. The teachers were randomly assigned to teach one of the three writing methods, and students were randomly assigned to a group as well. Each day, students met with their assigned group for 15 minutes of writing instruction.

Teachers in the writing workshop and interactive writing groups were provided training in implementation and instructional methods. Additionally, these groups received a checklist to use for their daily instruction in order to be sure they were including all the necessary components of either a writing workshop or interactive writing session. The control writing group kept records of the completed writing tasks, but were not given any training or instruction in how to conduct their writing lessons. The researcher observed students in all three groups, and students' writing skills were assessed using the Test of Early Written Language in August and May.

At the beginning of the study, the researchers found no significant differences between the foundational or compositional writing skills between the three groups. At the end of the study, the researchers found no significant differences between the foundational writing skills of students among the three writing groups. The researcher expected this result, as all three groups provided students instruction intended to build their foundational skills. The researcher did find a significant difference in the students' compositional skills, noting that students in the writing workshop and interactive writing groups demonstrated greater growth than students in the control group. Students in the first two groups showed greater mastery in areas such as “understanding the various purposes, forms, and functions of writing, and use of theme, topic sentences, and organizational structure in the creation of narrative text” (p. 41).

In order to support primary students in their acquisition of writing skills, Jones recommends creating a writing-rich environment where students have access to a variety of tools

to use when writing, editing, and publishing their writing. Teachers should include think-alouds and modeling in their writing instruction, and should explicitly teach the writing process including “planning, drafting, and revising” (p. 42). Additionally, teachers should create a community of writers by teaching students to “discuss their ideas and thoughts as a means for planning, drafting, revising, and sharing their writings” (p. 42). Teachers should also provide time for students to read and reread their own work, as well as work written by peers.

Snyders (2014) conducted a case study on three kindergarten students in her class, two female and one male, in an upper Midwest public school. The kindergarten program was a full-day class that met 3 days per week. The teacher-researcher examined student work, conducted interviews with the students, and recorded student-teacher writing conferences to gather data. The study explored kindergarten students’ growth as writers, as well as their confidence in their writing ability and their identity as writers. The teacher-researcher examined three questions: “How do Kindergarteners describe themselves as writers? Will writing self-efficacy of students change throughout the writing workshop experience? Will students notice and utilize writing processes from authentic literature in their writing products?” (p. 406).

Students were randomly selected to participate in the study at the beginning of the school year. The teacher-researcher conducted her study during the writing workshop period of each school day. Each writing workshop lesson consisted of a minilesson as well as time for students to write independently while the teacher conducted writing conferences.

Data were collected over a 10-week period. Snyders collected writing samples, conducted interviews, and recorded her conferences and “examined data for similarities, patterns, and growth” (p. 407). The researcher analyzed writing samples and “looked for indicators of the application of strategies and skills discussed during large group mini-lessons and individual

conferences, as well as growth over time” (p. 407). The teacher conferred with each student every three days, and during each conference observed the student as a writer and provided instruction in skills or strategies for each student to work on.

The teacher-researcher found that “The writing workshop provided a learning atmosphere that was conducive to the formation of their individual writing identities. Daily writing mini-lessons influenced writer identity as students associated themselves with the authors and illustrators explored during mini-lessons” (p. 413). Snyders found that students’ writing stamina increased over time, and students gained confidence in their abilities as writers. The teacher-researcher recommends implementing writing workshop early on in the year in order for students to receive maximum benefit.

### Summary

Reading workshop is an effective method of supporting students in their reading development, and differentiation of instruction has positive results on students’ reading ability. The present study is an examination of reading conferences and differentiated instruction, documenting student progress in reading ability over time. This study extends the research on the benefit of differentiated instruction and reading workshop conferences by providing data on student growth and progress.

## Chapter 3 Method

### Research Approach

This study utilizes teacher action research, a subcategory of qualitative research methodology. Qualitative research “integrates the methods and techniques of observing, documenting, analyzing, and interpreting characteristics, patterns, attributes, and meanings of human phenomena under study” (MacDonald, 2012, p. 34). Action research, in turn, “involves a cyclic process of research, reflection, and action” (p. 36), and operates under the idea that each person is unique and brings their own perspective to a research study. This mode of conducting research allows for active participation between the researcher and the research subjects. It is recommended that three methods of data collection be utilized in participatory action research so “as to triangulate data generation” (p. 41). This study utilizes observation notes, running record reading assessments, and student response in data collection.

The researcher attended two years of professional development on implementing and teaching reading workshop, and the school district has adopted reading workshop as the primary method of reading instruction and provided curriculum. This research methodology was decided upon because of the researcher’s ongoing work teaching reading workshop on a day-to-day basis, as well as access to professional development. The researcher selected a participatory-action research project because of continued access to the same group of students and the ability to track data over an entire school year.

## Ethical Standards

This paper adheres to the ethical standards for protection of human subjects of the American Psychological Association (2010). Additionally, a research proposal was reviewed by the school principal and the researcher's thesis advisor and approved as a teacher action research project. This study did not require the researcher to go through an Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects review because the researcher was the teacher of record for the participants and evaluated evidence of student performance within the activities of the classroom's existing procedures.

## Sample and Site

The present study was conducted in a first grade class of 19 students aged 6-8 in a suburban community. The class consisted of 12 male students and 7 female students. Two students were designated as English Language Learners (ELL), both scoring Early Advanced on their CELDT tests, and one student had an Individualized Education Plan. The class consisted of students who were 89% Caucasian (17 students), and 11% Asian (2 students). The name of the school, school district, and all student names have been changed to protect confidentiality.

## Demographic Information

### Park Elementary Report (2016)

School	Code	Hispanic or Latino of any race	American Indian or Alaska Native, not Hispanic	Asian, not Hispanic	Pacific Islander, not Hispanic	Filipino, not Hispanic	African American, not Hispanic	White, not Hispanic	Two or more races, not Hispanic	Not reported	Total
Park Elementary	0124578	37	2	8	1	0	2	286	24	5	365



## Report Total (2016)

Level	Code	Hispanic or Latino of any race	American Indian or Alaska Native, not Hispanic	Asian, not Hispanic	Pacific Islander, Not Hispanic	Filipino, not Hispanic	African American, not Hispanic	White, not Hispanic	Two or more races, not Hispanic	Not reported	Total
District total	2175002	212	8	75	4	10	21	1,893	83	24	2,330
County total	21	9,332	131	1,711	94	209	694	19,571	1,443	453	33,638
State total	00	3,360,562	34,704	551,229	30,436	156,166	361,752	1,500,932	192,146	38,810	6,226,737

## Access and Permissions

I, as the teacher of record, collected data on students in the classroom as part of the regular school day. The school administrator granted permission for the researcher to conduct this study as part of a master's thesis.

## Data Gathering Procedures

The researcher met with each student approximately once per week for a 5-10 minute reading conference. During each conference, the teacher listened to students as they read at their independent reading level, and then decided on a skill or strategy to teach based on what the student demonstrated he or she needed to learn. The researcher took observational notes during each conference, where she noted student strengths, areas for growth, and the skill or strategy that was taught during the conference. During conferences the researcher also asked students to reflect on how they were progressing as readers, what they thought they were doing well, and how their current independent reading level felt for them. In addition to observational notes and student responses, the researcher also administered the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System (2011) assessment approximately twice per trimester to assess students' independent reading levels.

### Data Analysis Approach

Once data were collected from October to March of the 2016-2017 school year, the researcher analyzed each student's progress towards individual goals. The researcher noted themes and patterns within conferences and planned lessons for the whole class and small groups based on this data.

During conferences, the researcher provided time for students to practice the new skill or strategy that was taught while the researcher observed and offered coaching if necessary. The researcher was able to note student progress from conference to conference based on the students' use of each new skill or strategy.

Often during the reflection portion of one-on-one conferences, students communicated that they felt ready to move to a new reading level, leading the researcher to administer a running record assessment and in many cases, move the student to a new level. Time spent reading and communicating with each student lead to students progressing and growing as readers. Reading at one's independent reading level is crucial for developing readers, and one's independent reading level is one that is "just right," it is not too easy or too difficult.

### Reliability

According to Patten (2012), "A test is said to be reliable if it yields consistent results" (p. 73). The procedures used for this study were teacher designed based on the content of the conference with a focus on word attack skills. The researcher identified approaches to instruction within the context of the conference and used these approaches, along with record keeping techniques to document student progress during each conference setting.

*Reliability of Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System*

An evaluation of the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System was conducted to examine whether the books at each reading level were reliable across fiction and nonfiction genres. Additionally, research was conducted to examine the correlation between the Benchmark Assessment System and other valid reading assessments. Testing occurred among 498 students in ethnically and socioeconomically diverse groups of 22 schools from 5 different regions across the United States.

Researchers examined the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System for test-retest reliability to make sure students received the same or similar scores when reading fiction and nonfiction at the same reading level. The Benchmark Assessment System tested with .97 test-retest reliability between fiction and nonfiction texts.

*Validity*

According to Patten (2012), “a measure is valid to the extent that it measures what it is designed to measure and it accurately performs the function(s) it is purported to perform” (p. 61). Validity can be described as the relationship of the measure to word attack skills. The researcher and her advisor reviewed conferencing activities in light of face validity. On its surface, the activities are related to common word attack skills used by beginning readers.

*Validity of Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System*

Researchers tested for validity by comparing student scores on the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System to scores on the Reading Recovery Text Level Assessment, which, like the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System, assesses decoding, fluency,

vocabulary, and reading comprehension, and has been recognized by the US Department of Education as an effective reading program. Researchers found a correlation of .94 for fiction and .93 for nonfiction between Fountas and Pinnell and Reading Recovery.

## Chapter 4 Findings

### Description of Site, Individuals, Data

Park School District uses the Fountas and Pinnell Guided Reading Level (2011) system to assess student reading ability. First graders are expected to begin the school year reading at level C and progress to level E by the end of the first trimester, G by the end of the second trimester, and level I by the end of the school year. Students who possess pre-reading skills but do not yet read independently at level A are designated as reading at level AA. Students who reach level M during the first grade year are not often moved beyond this level, as level M is the end-of-year goal for second grade. The first grade teachers at Park School have decided not to move first grade students beyond level M, as books beyond this level are generally not age-appropriate.

### *Description of Levels*

Books at level C contain simple text written on familiar topics with about three lines of text per page. Readers at level C are comfortable reading left to right across pages, and no longer need to rely heavily on pointing with their finger while reading. C level readers are able to read many high-frequency words, and level C books are typically repetitive and can contain simple dialogue. Books at level C contain words that are typically accompanied by pictures that will aid in decoding.

Books at level E contain about five lines of text per page. Level E readers are able to rely more on their decoding skills and less on picture clues to decode unfamiliar words. Books at

level E typically contain a clear beginning, middle, and end, and are written about easy to understand topics and ideas. Dialogue can be between multiple characters, and sentences end with varied punctuation.

Level G books contain about five lines of text per page, but the print size becomes smaller and books contain more words on each page. Level G readers are able to read a wide variety of high-frequency words and the language, stories, and topics become more complex. G readers are able to use a variety of word-solving strategies while reading to decode unfamiliar words. Level G books typically contain few content-specific vocabulary words, and contain content that expands beyond a child's experiences. Sentences are of varied length, and books contain a greater number of multisyllabic words.

Level I readers are able to read longer books that require a higher level of focus and attention. Sentences in level I books are of varied length, and can contain more than ten words. Students who are reading at level I are able to transition from reading aloud to reading silently, and typically do not need to point to words as they read. Narrative stories can contain multiple episodes or chapters with little repetition and similar characters across chapters. Books can be on unfamiliar topics and can contain dialogue between more than two characters. Content-specific vocabulary words are defined through text or illustrations, and books can contain many three-syllable words, including compound words that are easily decodable.

#### Expected Rate of Student Progression Throughout First Grade

Beginning of year	End of first trimester	End of second trimester	End of year
C	E	G	I

## Student Data

Student	Beginning of year	End of first trimester	End of second trimester
Robert	AA	B	E
David	J	L	M
Chris	D	F	H
Hadley	G	K	M
Elizabeth	H	K	M
Karen	E	H	J
Kristine	C	E	H
Liam	M	M	M
Iris	I	J	L
Jacob	E	H	K
Lee	E	G	I
Carl	L	M	M
Jeff	F	I	L
Lauren	B	E	G
Harry	C	D	H
Elliot	B	D	H
Ray	A	A	B
Sabrina	D	E	G
Aaron	AA	A	B

Key: Not Meeting Standards, Meeting Standards, Exceeding Standards

### Conference Data

All student names have been changed to protect confidentiality.

#### *Robert*

Robert entered Park School after attending an alternative kindergarten program reading at level AA. At the beginning of the year, Robert knew 12/26 letter names and 4/26 letter sounds. He required instruction on letter sounds and instruction on basic sounding out of consonant, vowel, consonant (CVC) words. Additionally, Robert's individualized lessons consisted of learning to point to each word while reading, checking the picture when decoding, and sounding words out letter by letter. Robert required instruction on working through unfamiliar words by making predictions about the word using clues from the book. As the year progressed, Robert demonstrated that he was committed to working hard in learning to read. He diligently practiced strategies introduced by the researcher, and persevered through difficult work. At the end of the first trimester, Robert had progressed to level B, and knew 22/26 letter names and 21/26 letter sounds.

At the start of the second trimester, Robert began participating in a small reading intervention group for 30 minutes 3 days per week. During the second trimester, Robert required instruction on finding small words inside larger words to aid in decoding, skipping an unfamiliar word and coming back to it after reading the rest of the page, and rereading to support comprehension. With the support of reading intervention as well as individualized lessons in class, Robert had progressed to level E by the end of the second trimester.



*David*

David entered first grade reading at level J, already above the end-of-year benchmark. His individualized lessons included strategy instruction on slowing down while reading to study and learn from photographs or illustrations in books, as well as rereading to smooth out his voice. David worked to improve his reading fluency, and his mother reported that he began to admonish her during bedtime read alouds if she failed to read with expression: “*Mom! You’re supposed to read with expression!*” often demonstrating what a fluent reader sounds like for her. At the end of the first trimester, David had progressed to level L.

During the second trimester, David’s individualized lessons consisted of continued instruction on slowing down to learn from illustrations in books and stopping to monitor his comprehension while reading. By the end of the second trimester, David had progressed to level M.

*Chris*

Chris began the school year reading at level D. During the first trimester, Chris’ individualized lessons consisted of strategy instruction on paying attention to words in their entirety rather than reading only the first few letters, reading suffixes, and skipping a difficult word and coming back to it. Additionally, Chris required instruction on how to come up with a prediction about what an unfamiliar word might be by using the context of the sentence and/or the pictures on the page. Chris persevered through difficult words, often spending several minutes at a time on a single word. At the end of the first trimester Chris had progressed to level F.

During the second trimester, Chris’ individualized lessons consisted of instruction on rereading to smooth out his voice, as well as additional lessons on skipping a word and coming

back to it after reading the rest of the page. Chris continued to persevere through difficult words and was motivated to progress as a reader. At the end of the second trimester Chris had progressed to level H.

### *Hadley*

Hadley entered first grade reading at level G. Hadley's strategy instruction included lessons on rereading to smooth out her voice and reading punctuation (pausing, changing inflection) in her books. Hadley was an avid reader and at the end of the first trimester had progressed to level K.

During the second trimester, Hadley's individualized lessons included instruction on stopping to monitor her comprehension while reading, making sure to read captions and text boxes, and reading fluently. At the end of the second trimester Hadley had progressed to level M.

### *Elizabeth*

Elizabeth entered first grade reading at level H. Her individualized lessons included strategy instruction on reading with expression and persevering through unfamiliar words. She frequently coached herself and reminded herself of strategies to try, "*You told me to work on rereading, I'm going to reread,*" "*This is hard but I'm not going to quit,*" as she read, and utilized strategies that were taught to the whole class as well as in one-on-one lessons. One-on-one sessions included lessons on paying attention to word parts and chunking words into smaller parts to decode, and reading punctuation. At the end of the first trimester, Elizabeth had progressed to level K.

During the second trimester, Elizabeth's individualized lessons included strategy instruction on monitoring comprehension, checking to make sure words made sense after

decoding, and rereading to smooth out her voice. At the end of the second trimester, Elizabeth had progressed to level M.

### *Karen*

Karen entered first grade reading at level E. Karen's individualized lessons included strategy instruction on rereading to smooth out her voice, reading punctuation, finding small, familiar words inside larger words, and "flipping the sound," when decoding to try multiple sounds for the same vowel. Additionally, Karen required coaching on slowing down and checking to make sure she understood what she was reading, and rereading if she did not understand. At the end of the first trimester, Karen had progressed to level H.

During the second trimester, Karen's individualized lessons included instruction on predicting what an unfamiliar word could be using context clues, monitoring comprehension, and checking to make sure a word made sense by going back and rereading after decoding. At the end of the second trimester, Karen had progressed to level J.

### *Kristine*

Kristine entered first grade reading at level C. Kristine's individualized lessons included strategy instruction on how to make a prediction about what an unfamiliar word might be using context clues and/or the picture on the page, and sounding words out while reading rather than guessing. Additionally, Kristine required instruction on reading suffixes, checking to monitor comprehension, and skipping an unfamiliar word and going back to it after reading the page. At the end of the first trimester, Kristine had progressed to level E.

During the second trimester, Kristine's individualized lessons consisted of additional instruction on monitoring comprehension, rereading after decoding to check for accuracy, and

making predictions about what an unfamiliar word could be based on context clues. At the end of the second trimester, Kristine had progressed to level H.

### *Liam*

Liam entered first grade reading at level M, the benchmark for end-of-year second graders. Liam's individualized lessons included instruction on checking the picture to predict what an unfamiliar word could be and paying attention to text features like bolded text. Additionally, Liam received instruction on reading punctuation as well as slowing down and reading fluently, like he was talking, rather than rushing through books. Liam required coaching on tuning in to new or interesting words to learn their meaning while reading, as well as checking in to see if a word sounded correct in context and rereading if it did not. At the end of the first trimester, Liam remained at level M, per the requirements of Park School.

During the second trimester, Liam's individualized lessons continued to include instruction on slowing down while reading and paying attention to punctuation. Lessons also included instruction on reading with expression, like one is talking, as well as stopping and decoding if a word did not sound correct or make sense in context. At the end of the second trimester Liam remained at level M.

### *Iris*

Iris entered first grade reading at level I. Iris' individualized lessons included strategy instruction on rereading to smooth out her voice, as well as slowing down and checking in with what she read to monitor comprehension. Additionally, Iris required coaching on summarizing pages while reading. At the end of the first trimester, Iris had progressed to level J.

During the second trimester, Iris' individualized lessons included additional instruction on slowing down while reading and monitoring comprehension, as well as rereading after decoding to make sure the word made sense in context. Additionally, Iris required lessons on paying attention to the whole word rather than reading only the first few letters. At the end of the second trimester, Iris had progressed to level L.

*Jacob*

Jacob entered first grade reading at level E. Jacob's individualized lessons included strategy instruction on slowing down while reading in order to be understood, pausing at punctuation, and reading with expression. Additionally, Jacob received instruction on how to stop and summarize what he read to check for comprehension and to reread if he did not understand. At the end of the first trimester, Jacob had progressed to level H.

During the second trimester, Jacob's individualized lessons included strategy instruction on slowing down and learning the meaning of unfamiliar words by paying attention to the context of the book, as well as continued instruction on slowing down and enunciating while reading. Jacob required additional support in monitoring his comprehension while reading, as well as lessons on rereading to make sure he understood what he read. At the end of the second trimester, Jacob had progressed to level K.

*Lee*

Lee entered first grade reading at level E. During the first trimester, Lee's individualized lessons included strategy instruction on slowing down and checking to make sure he understood what he read, rereading to smooth out his voice, and paying attention to what the text said, rather

than omitting or substituting words due to speeding through reading. At the end of the first trimester, Lee had progressed to level H.

During the second trimester, Lee continued to require lessons on slowing down while reading and focusing on what the words on the page said, rather than omitting or inserting words into the text. At the end of the second trimester, Lee had progressed to level I.

### *Carl*

Carl entered first grade reading at level L, already a fluent and avid reader. Carl's individualized lessons included instruction on reading punctuation, pausing at commas and periods, paying attention to labels and captions in books to learn as much as possible from pictures or diagrams, and finding new and interesting key words and thinking about what they meant. Since Carl was such a fluent reader, his goal was to concentrate on reading books that had more words and fewer pictures per page, so his strategy lessons included instruction on how to maintain one's place on a page full of words, and to think about the book periodically to make sure he understood what he read. By the end of the first trimester, Carl had progressed to level M.

During the second trimester, Carl's individualized lessons contained instruction on finding and thinking about key words in a text, learning new words from the context of the book, and monitoring comprehension while reading. At the end of the second trimester Carl remained at level M.

### *Jeff*

Jeff entered first grade reading at level F. Jeff's individualized lessons included strategy instruction on reading punctuation, pausing at commas and periods, slowing down to make sure

not to omit words accidentally, and checking to monitor his comprehension. By the end of the first trimester, Jeff had progressed to level I.

During the second trimester, Jeff's individualized lessons consisted of instruction on learning a new word's meaning by paying attention to the context of the book, monitoring his comprehension while reading, and rereading if he did not understand what he read. Jeff continued to require instruction on slowing down and paying attention to the words on the page in order to make sure not to omit or insert words into the text. At the end of the second trimester, Jeff had progressed to level L.

### *Lauren*

Lauren entered first grade reading at level B. Beginning in October and continuing through December, Lauren participated in a small-group reading intervention program for 30 minutes 3 days per week. During the first trimester, Lauren's individualized lessons included strategy instruction on reading the words on the page rather than relying on the picture and guessing, reading carefully to make sure not to omit or insert words, chunking words into small parts to decode each part, skipping an unfamiliar word and going back to it after reading the page, and making a prediction about what a word could be based on context. By the end of the first trimester, Lauren had progressed to level E and was exited from the intervention group.

During the second trimester, Lauren's individualized lessons included instruction on flipping the sound or trying to sound out a letter with a different sound, rereading after decoding to be sure the word made sense in context, as well as continued instruction on making predictions about what unfamiliar words could be while reading based on context. At the end of the second trimester, Lauren had progressed to level G.

*Harry*

Harry entered first grade reading at level C. Harry's individualized lessons included strategy instruction on reading sight words, thinking about what he read to make sure it made sense and rereading if it did not, flipping the sound, chunking words into smaller parts to decode them, skipping an unfamiliar word and going back to it after reading the page, and making predictions about what an unfamiliar word could be based on context clues. By the end of the first trimester Harry had progressed to level D.

During the second trimester, Harry's individualized lessons included strategy instruction on rereading to smooth out his voice and reading with expression. Harry continued to require instruction on making predictions about what unfamiliar words could be based on context, as well as skipping an unfamiliar word and going back to it after reading the rest of the page. At the end of the second trimester, Harry had progressed to level H.

*Elliot*

Elliot entered first grade reading at level B. Beginning in October and continuing through December, Elliot participated in a small-group reading intervention program for 30 minutes 3 days per week. During the first trimester, Elliot's individualized lessons included strategy instruction on monitoring comprehension and checking in to make sure he understood what he read, rereading to smooth out his voice after decoding, and flipping the sound. Elliot was eager to improve as a reader and often requested to be assessed so he could move up to a new level. By the end of the first trimester, Elliot had progressed to level D and was exited from the intervention group.

During the second trimester, Elliot's individualized lessons included instruction on rereading after decoding and making predictions about unfamiliar words based on context. Elliot



continued to require instruction on flipping the sound and monitoring for comprehension. At the end of the second trimester, Elliot had progressed to level H.

### *Ray*

Ray entered first grade reading at level A. Beginning in October and continuing through March, Ray participated in a small-group reading intervention program for 30 minutes 3 days per week. At the beginning of the year, Ray knew 25/26 letter names and 18/26 letter sounds. During the first trimester, Ray required lessons about the sounds letters make and basic sounding out of consonant, vowel, consonant (CVC) words. Ray's individualized lessons consisted of learning to pay attention to the words on the page, rather than telling the story by looking at the picture, predicting what an unfamiliar word could be based on context, and pointing to each word while reading. Additionally, Ray required instruction on working through unfamiliar words by looking at the pictures and making predictions about what the word could be, noticing words he had already decoded that were repeated throughout a book, and paying attention to all the letters in a word. At the end of the first trimester, Ray remained at level A, but knew 26/26 letter names and 21/26 letter sounds.

During the second trimester, Ray's individualized lessons included strategy instruction on making predictions about what words could be based on context, reading sight words, paying attention to the words on the page and reading what they say, sounding out letters rather than guessing at words, and monitoring comprehension. At the end of the second trimester, Ray had progressed to level B, and the researcher as well as the student study team at Park School recommended Ray for assessment to determine if he required special education services.

*Sabrina*

Sabrina entered first grade reading at level D. Sabrina's individualized lessons included strategy instruction on chunking words into smaller parts and decoding each part, making predictions about what a word could be based on context, using more than one strategy to decode an unfamiliar word, reading suffixes, and rereading to smooth out her voice. Sabrina proved to be a dedicated reader and desperately wanted to continue to move up to new reading levels. She practiced diligently and worked to improve as a reader. By the end of the first trimester, Sabrina had progressed to level E.

During the second trimester, Sabrina's individualized lessons included instruction on rereading to smooth out her voice, checking to see if a word she decoded made sense in context, recognizing word parts such as /all/ or /am/ and using them while decoding, flipping the sound, and making predictions about what words could say based on context. At the end of the second trimester, Sabrina had progressed to level G.

*Aaron*

Aaron entered first grade reading at level AA. Aaron had an IEP and saw the resource specialist for 30 minutes 4 days per week. At the beginning of the year, Aaron knew 22/26 letter names and 17/26 letter sounds. He required lessons about the sounds letters make and basic sounding out of consonant, vowel, consonant (CVC) words. Aaron's individualized lessons included strategy instruction on pointing to each word while reading, previewing a book to predict what it might be about and activate prior knowledge, flipping the sound, reading all the letters in a word, noticing words he had already decoded that were repeated throughout a book, paying attention to words on the page and reading them rather than telling the story by looking at

the picture, and skipping an unfamiliar word and coming back to it. By the end of the first trimester, Aaron had progressed to level A, and knew 24/26 letter names and 23/26 letter sounds.

During the second trimester, Aaron's individualized lessons included instruction on saying each sound in a word while decoding, noticing when the pattern changed in a book and paying attention to what the words say, reading the words rather than telling the story by looking at the pictures, and skipping an unfamiliar word and coming back to it after reading the rest of the page. Aaron continued to require strategy instruction on chunking words into small parts to decode them and rereading to smooth out his voice after decoding. At the end of the second trimester Aaron had progressed to level B.

### Themes

Major themes include many students requiring individualized lessons on strategies such as breaking words into small parts, predicting what words could be based on context and word knowledge, and rereading to read fluently. Differences are apparent when comparing conferences between students that are reading well above grade level, those at grade level, and those below grade level.

Students above grade level often required lessons on comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary knowledge. Students reading above grade level were likely to require lessons based around fluency, often practicing reading with expression and proper intonation and voice. Students well above grade level were likely to learn strategies quickly and internalize them, often demonstrating them as strengths in later conferences.

Students at grade level tended to require lessons based around decoding, such as breaking words into parts, flipping the sound to replace one sound for another, and skipping an unfamiliar

word and returning to it after reading the rest of the sentence or page. Students at grade level were likely to require coaching on rereading for comprehension, as they worked hard to decode their books and often forgot or did not pay attention to what they were reading. Students at grade level were likely to require coaching on making predictions, and stopping to think about what they were reading.

Students below grade level required lessons on letter sounds, basic decoding of consonant-vowel-consonant words, and reading sight words. These students were most likely to require lessons be repeated, as well as require heavy prompting and coaching from the researcher. Students below grade level benefitted from lessons on breaking words into small parts to decode them, as well as practice reading the words on the page rather than telling the story by looking at a book's pictures.

### Summary

Students participated in individualized lessons and were given the opportunity to advance to new reading levels when they were ready, rather than only when the district mandated testing. The researcher noted students' progress and strengths, often noting that what was once taught in an individualized lesson became a strength or a strategy often used by the student in later conferences. All students progressed in their reading ability, with 84% of students (16 out of 19) reading at or above the grade level benchmark of level G by the end of the data collection period. Time spent reading each day in class at one's appropriate independent reading level leads to growth and improvement in reading.

## Chapter 5 Discussion /Analysis

### Summary of Major Findings

The researcher found that all students progressed in their reading ability during the period of data collection, and running record assessments indicate that 84% of students were performing at or above grade level at the end of the data collection period, as only three students were performing below grade level. The researcher found that all students benefitted from direct instruction on specific skills and strategies, as all students showed growth during the data collection period.

### Comparison of Findings to the Literature

Reading workshop directly effects the reading ability of first grade students. The researcher implemented one-on-one conferences where specific skills were taught and modeled. The researcher noted that all students in the study improved as readers, similar to the research findings of Mounla, Bahous, and Nabhani (2011). Short conferences containing direct instruction specifically tailored to each student allowed each student time to practice and learn with the support of the researcher. Students were shown to utilize strategies taught in prior conferences and minilessons, as noted by Boushey and Moser (2012). Students benefitted from differentiated lessons tailored to their specific needs, also noted by Tomlinson (2000).

### Limitations/Gaps in the Research

This study was limited by its small size. The small class of 19 participants provided limited data, and data were collected over a very short period of time. Only one researcher collected data, and no control group was studied alongside the featured classroom.

### Implications for Future Research

Future research is recommended to study the effectiveness of reading workshop conferences on student word attack skills. Data analysis of students in an entire school district or large population of students would be valuable, as would data comparing student skills from year to year, particularly once reading workshop has been implemented and put in practice for several years. Research comparing the word attack skills and reading ability of students in reading workshop programs and students in more traditional literacy programs would be valuable as well.

### Overall Significance of the Study

The present study provides information that shows reading workshop to be an effective model of literacy instruction. Reading workshop has been shown to be an effective method of supporting students in their reading ability in students from kindergarten through high school, as reading workshop allows for a high level of differentiation among learners. All students learn at different rates and in different ways, and differentiating instruction is an effective way to make sure all students receive the needed tools to succeed.

### About the Author

Samantha Everbeck has taught first grade for three years. She earned a Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology from Pitzer College, a Multiple Subject teaching credential, and an Education

Specialist teaching credential from Dominican University of California. Samantha is passionate about reading and literacy.

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