

RUNNING HEAD: Reading Attitudes

STUDENT READING ATTITUDES IN RELATION TO THE INSTRUCIONAL APPROACH

By

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## ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to find if there was a significant difference in student reading attitudes based on the type of instructional approach. The traditional reading approach, using the Basal program, and the balanced literacy approach were the two models examined in this study. It is important to consider student reading attitudes in result of instruction, in order to determine the most effective and engaging approach. Research shows that student attitudes about reading are directly related to student achievement. Findings of this study show that one second grade classroom had a significant increase in attitudes about reading using the balanced literacy approach after exposure to traditional approach to reading. After collecting and reviewing the findings of this study, current research and literature, and the statistical data from one second grade classroom, it is found that there is an instructional approach to reading that results in increased student attitude.

## INTRODUCTION

### *Background, Issues and Concerns.*

The classroom used in this study, is part of a suburban school district located in the Midwest. In this district there are twenty-one elementary schools, five middle schools, and four high schools. With Common Core State Standards (CCSS) being implemented in the district for the 2012-2013 school year, expectations for student achievement has risen in all subject areas, especially in the area of reading. This has increased administrator and teacher awareness of what are the most effective reading instructional methods. In result, the district has shifted from a traditional reading model, using a basal reading series, to a balanced literacy approach in the classroom. Many educators question if there is a significant difference in student reading attitudes in regards to the instructional approach used. Current research argues that balanced literacy increases student engagement that fosters positive attitudes about reading.

### *Practice Under Investigation.*

The practice under investigation will be looking at student reading attitude scores. There will be an investigation to see if there is a significant difference in reading attitude scores based on the instructional approach used in the classroom. This study will be looking at survey results given to second grade students. Effective reading instruction will be investigated to see how improvements can be made and how this can be applied to the classroom.

### *School Policy to be informed by Study.*

The district used in this study has set expectations for student reading levels based on the rigorous demands of the Common Core State Standards. If this study reveals a significant difference of reading attitudes in relation to the instructional approach in the classroom, then this

information could inform administrators and educators about the most effective and engaging reading approach to use in the classroom.

*Conceptual Underpinning.*

The implementation of a reading program or model in a classroom has the ability to affect student reading attitudes. It is important that students are able to develop an appreciation for reading through experiences in instruction and in the classroom. This will encourage students to read often and by choice. The only way for students to improve their reading abilities is to read each and everyday while being an active part of the process of reading. According to leaders in literacy education, Irene Fountas and Gay Pinnell, believe that reading instruction which fosters the love and enjoyment of reading will result in students meeting high expectations set by the state and teachers will see increased levels of achievement in their classrooms (Fountas & Pinnell 2006).

*Statement of the Problem.*

The problem is the lack of effective reading instruction can possibly hold students back from meeting the high expectations put on students by state standards.

*Purpose of Study.*

If there is a significant difference in student reading attitudes based on the method of instruction used in the classroom, then teachers will need to know which method fosters a more positive experience for students.

*Research Question.*

RQ: Is there a significant difference in student reading attitudes in classrooms with a traditional approach versus a balanced literacy approach to reading instruction?

*Null Hypothesis.*

H<sub>0</sub>. There is no significant difference between the traditional reading instruction and a balanced literacy approach in relation to student reading attitudes.

*Anticipated Benefits of the Study.*

If there is a significant difference in student reading attitudes based on method of instruction, districts may need to change their current practices and adapt to student needs.

*Definition of Terms.*

Common Core State Standards (CCSS): is a U.S. education initiative that seeks to bring diverse state curricula into alignment and raised the level of expectations for student achievement.

Balanced Literacy: an approach to reading and writing instruction where students learn through authentic experiences in the classroom and are active participants in the learning process.

Assessments are typically formative and ongoing throughout the year. Students work in small groups with the teacher and other classmates based on needs and are offered individual reading conferences.

Traditional Reading Instruction: this approach is typically accompanied with the Basal Reading Series. Teachers teach lecture style and students use worksheets and/or workbooks to practice newly taught concepts. Assessment types are typically “end of unit” assessments. All students are taught the same and given the same assessment. Little to no differentiating takes place.

Basal Reading Series: a program for reading instruction that teaches skills in the areas of phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency in isolation. All students participate in the same readings that accompany these skills. Often basal reading programs use workbooks to practice the different skills taught.

*Summary.*

A study was conducted to see if there was a significant difference in student reading attitudes using a traditional reading approach or a balanced literacy approach in the classroom. If the t-test concludes there was a significant difference, teachers should change or modify their instructional practices to meet the needs of the students in their classroom. Since expectations of student reading abilities have been raised from the implementation of CCSS, it is necessary to examine the most effective instructional approaches. After this study is completed, school districts can benefit by looking at the survey data and making appropriate and effective changes to their overall reading model.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Effective literacy instruction is currently the topic of conversation for every school district, school, administrator, teacher, and parent. This is because “if we assessed America’s students now, only 15% would perform at the level suggested by the standards” indicating that 85% of our student population is failing (Calkins, 2012, p. 6). Current research shows children who are not able to read by third grade, have a very little chance to ever learn to read or achieve success in their adulthood lives. According to the National Assessment of Education Progress, less than one third of the nation’s fourth-grade students read at or above the proficient achievement level (Martinez, 2008). Children who struggle in reading are more likely to drop out of school before graduating, fail classes, become teenage parents, commit a crime, and/or live less than fully literate lives (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009, p. xi). Therefore, it is extremely important to analyze literacy programs and reading instruction carefully before choosing what to implement in the classroom. When determining effective literacy programs, it is key to identify factors that contribute to the levels of student engagement. This will directly affect student’s attitudes about reading that can ultimately effect overall student achievement.

Reading attitude is defined as the feeling about reading that results in the adoption or avoidance of positive reading habits. There has been much research identifying factors that affect reading attitudes (Martinez, 2008). A few statements regarding reading attitudes have been researched such as, girls have more positive reading attitudes than boys and younger students have more positive reading attitudes than older students. While much research debates the conclusion of these statements, there is one underlying factor that all research points to.

Studies indicate the amount of quality time students spend reading, in and out of school, is influenced by their level of engagement with the text and their overall reading abilities. The

higher students attitudes about reading will determine the amount of time they engage in reading activities (Martinez, 2088). Unfortunately, “educators often make decisions about instruction that compromise or supplant the kind of experiences all children need to become engaged, successful readers” (Allington, 2012 p.1). Since education research has clearly identified that engaging instruction fosters positive attitudes about reading, it is necessary to look at what instruction will provide this key factor ultimately resulting in student achievement.

Common beliefs of school districts and administrators are that in order to bridge the gap between students who are and who are not reading sufficiently is to purchase a new reading program. It is often believed that teachers need only to implement the new program with fidelity to resolve the issues regarding student reading abilities. Teachers currently are provided with little to no professional development that promotes a depth of understanding of how to teach students to read (Willows, 2008). Districts and administrators need to realize is that there is “not one program or set of policies that will result in proficient reading for all children” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009, p. xi). Though, there are specific characteristics of effective reading instruction which are repeatedly proven to increase student engagement, reading attitudes, and overall reading abilities.

According to Lucy M. Calkins, professor of English education at Columbia’s University’s Teachers College, schools are not allotting enough time for reading during the school hours or within their instruction. Calkins describes how in order for students to maintain reading at grade, they need to be reading a minimum of two hours per day (Silverman, 2006). This is very challenging to accomplish with reluctant readers. Therefore, building positive reading attitudes can motivate students to pick up a book and read. Allowing students to read something he or she chooses, as well as having access to a variety of text, will improve



enthusiasm for reading and increase the likelihood that a child will read outside of school. Some districts and administrators argue that there are not enough funds to purchase quantities of text to allow for a variety of reading materials and offer choice for students. A solution to this problem is to eliminate the use of workbooks and worksheets. Research shows these traditional approaches to reading instruction are not effective in fostering positive reading attitudes or reading achievement. This is also expensive for school districts to supply. The money allotted for these funds could be used to purchase actual text for the classroom (Allington, 2012).

According to the article, *The best way to prepare students for high-stakes reading assessments*, “readers read less than anyone else as we fill up their days with worksheets, skills testing, and test preparation” (Allington and Gabriel, 2012, p. 2).

A second factor that is evident in effective literacy instruction is one that places an emphasis on reading accurately. The ability to read accurately requires work-attack, decoding, and word-recognition skills. In order for students to stay engaged in a text and be able to read for enjoyment, they must have ability to experience high-success reading (Allington, 2012). The ability to learn to read takes a considerable amount of time while developing skills to read accurately along the way. Therefore, early intervention for students who are struggling with accuracy while reading, will help them be able to reach achievement at a better rate and also encourage reading for enjoyment (Dombey, 2010). When students are able to read for enjoyment, it will impact their overall attitude about reading.

As teachers build excitement about reading, students will develop the same enthusiasm. It is necessary that a literacy instructional approach allow for active literacy. This is when students have the opportunity to talk, write, or respond to what they are reading (Harvey, 2007). To be able to do this, students need to understand what they are reading, also known as the

ability to comprehend. In order to promote comprehension skills in the classroom, an instructional approach to literacy should be one that allows students to talk and discuss what they are reading (Allington, 2012). A research study conducted in 2006, concluded that allowing students to talk and discuss what they have read for as little as ten minutes a day, improved standardized test scores and overall levels of engagement (Allington, 2012). In another study, it was determined two to three hours of test prep had a much smaller ability to increase student test scores than students that were provided opportunities to read and discuss their readings with peers (Allington & Gabriel, 2012). Teachers need to plan for opportunities for student to participate in discussion, such as using book clubs, reading response journal, or classroom discussions.

Clearly, there is a lot of available research that identifies the characteristics of an effective literacy approach in the classroom, yet, there still is much debate about what reading program or reading model supports this research. The most commonly used models to literacy instruction in the classroom are the traditional approach and the balanced approach. Neither of these approaches are new to the education world, yet have been brought forward at different times depending on state and district initiatives.

The traditional approach to reading instruction is often associated with the basal reading series. This approach teaches skills in isolation while using workbooks and worksheets to reinforce the skills taught. Student are not given choice in selecting text to read, rather stories are pre-designated and have a focus on specific vocabulary, grammar, and phonics skills (Morrison & Mosser, 1993). The balanced literacy approach, sometime referred to as the Whole Language Approach, is most commonly associated with the reader's workshop model. "The term workshop, implies, students must be actively engaged in exploring texts in many different

ways” (Fountas, 2006, p. xxxiii). Specific skills are taught explicitly in whole group settings, though are integrated throughout different areas and subjects, which is ultimately necessary for student reading progress to be made (Willows, 2008). Research strongly supports a balanced and motivating approach to reading instruction in the classroom, as it is key to the success of student reading abilities. Yet, even though, “balanced literacy has become the mantra of elementary literacy education, many classroom teachers are still not implementing instruction that is consistent with the evidence” (Willow, 2008 p. 22).

According to Willow (2008), the Canadian Psychological Association explains that students are not meeting high levels of success in reading as a result of reading instruction in the primary grades are not following along with current research and evidence. In recent years, the focus of finding the “right” reading program to implement is now shifting to providing opportunities for professional development. Willow (2008), continues to say in the article, *Reducing Literacy Failure Through Teacher Development: Implementing a Balanced and Flexible Literacy Diet*, “teachers need not throw out all previous classroom practices to create a more effective literacy program; they simply need to...choose or create a balanced and appealing literacy diet for students” (p. 23). The power to implement effective reading instructional practices is now the responsibility of school districts, schools, administrators, and teachers. The research explains what needs to be done in order for students to develop a love for reading and reach high levels of achievement. There has not been any more critical time for change, as the implementation of Common Core State Standards are making their way into each and every classroom and raising the level of expectations extremely high.

## RESEARCH METHODS

### *Research Design.*

A quantitative study was conducted to reveal if there is a significant difference in student reading attitudes in relation to a balanced literacy approach in the classroom. The control group is made up of second grade students. The independent variable is the use of the balanced literacy model, while the dependent variable is the student reading attitudes indicated on the *Elementary Reading Attitude Survey*. If the difference is found significant in scores based on instructional method then administrators and teachers will be informed of the most effective instructional method.

### *Study Group Description.*

One second grade classroom was chosen to be evaluated on instructional method and student reading attitudes. The second grade classroom used in this study is part of a small school with only 194 students total enrolled. The school is moderately diverse with 1.5 % Asian, 11.9% Black, 12.9% Hispanic, .5% Indian, and 67.5% White. Over half of the school (52%) is Free or Reduced lunch.

### *Data Collection and Instrumentation.*

Scores gathered from the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey will be collected and evaluated.

### *Statistical Analysis Methods.*

A t-test was conducted to find if there is a significant difference in student reading attitudes based on implementation of the balanced literacy model in the classroom. The source was broken down into two categories: pre balance literacy instruction and post balance literacy instruction. The mean, mean D, t-test, df, and p-value will be concluded from this test. The

Alpha level will be set at 0.25 to test the null hypothesis: there is no difference in student reading levels between classrooms with use of balanced literacy instruction and classrooms without the use of balanced literacy instruction.

## FINDINGS

A t-test was conducted in order to determine if there was a significant difference in student reading attitudes in relation to a traditional reading instructional approach and a balanced literacy approach in the classroom. The following tables, graphs, and charts will depict the organized findings based on data collected from the participating second grade classroom. This data is representative of the 2012-2013 school year.

Figure 1

**t-Test Analysis Results for reading attitudes in relation to type of reading instruction**

Dependent Variable: student reading attitude survey scores

Source	Mean	Mean D	<i>t</i> -test	df	<i>p</i> -value
Traditional	50.63				
Balanced Literacy	57.42	-6.79	-1.45	36	0.16

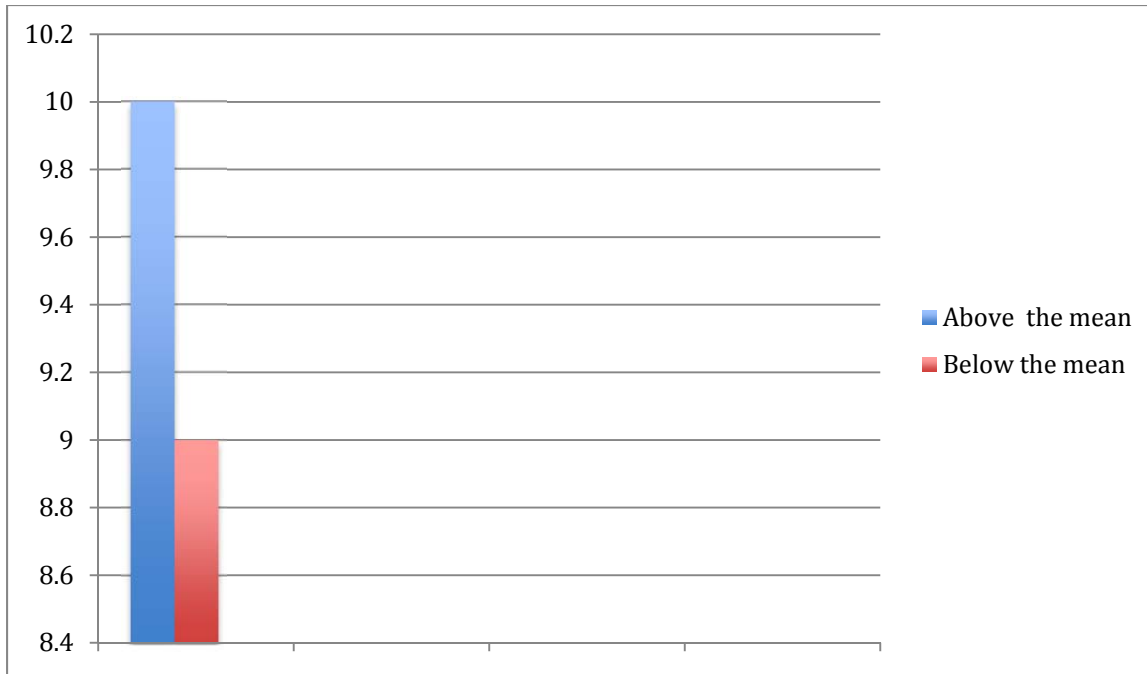
Note: Significant when  $p \leq 0.25$

The traditional reading instruction and balanced literacy approach was given to the same 19 students from one second grade classroom. The overall mean of reading attitudes with traditional reading instruction was 50.63 and the mean of reading attitudes with the balanced literacy approach was 57.42. The difference between both means (mean D) was -6.79. The t-test value was -1.45. The degree of freedom (df) is 36. The p-value was 0.16. The null hypothesis was that there is no difference between the traditional reading instruction and a balanced literacy approach and student reading attitudes. The p-value was 0.16, which was less than the alpha level of 0.25. The null was rejected because there was a significant difference between the p-value and the alpha level. There was a significant increase in positive reading attitudes with use

of the balanced literacy approach showing that this is the most effective instructional method for reading. If students have better attitudes about reading, it will result in higher engagement and overall leading to increased student achievement.

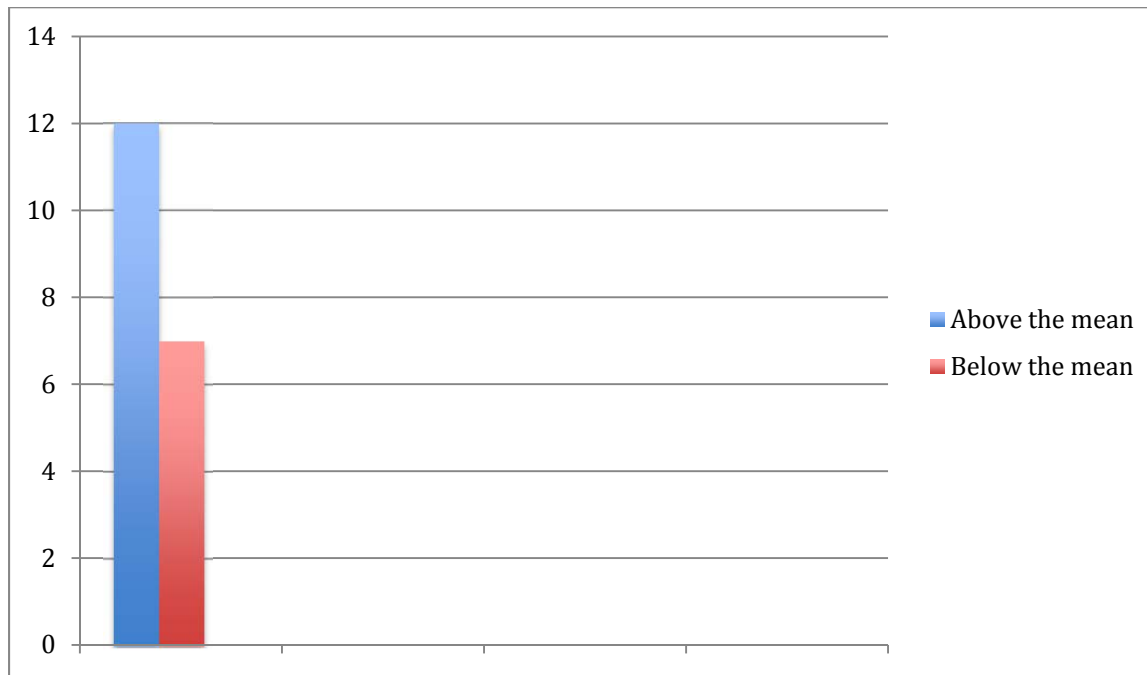
Figure 2

**2012 Student Reading Attitude Results**



The mean of second grade reading attitudes, indicated on the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey, in August of 2012 was 50.63. This table shows that ten out of the nineteen students surveyed, or 52% of students, scored above the overall mean of student reading attitudes in the classroom. Nine out of the nineteen students, or 47% of students, scored below the overall mean of student reading attitudes in the classroom.

Figure 3

**2013 Student Reading Attitude Results**

The mean of second grade reading attitudes, indicated on the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey, in May 2013 was 57.42. This was the mean difference (md) of -6.79 from the August survey results. This table shows that twelve out of the nineteen students surveyed, or 63% of students, scored above the overall mean of student reading attitudes in the classroom. Seven out of the nineteen students, or 37% of students, scored below the overall mean of student reading attitudes in the classroom.

All of the findings compiled answered the research question: “Is there a significant difference in student reading attitudes in classrooms with a traditional approach versus a balanced literacy approach to reading instruction?” Figures 1-3 identified that there was a significant difference in student reading attitudes in classrooms using a balanced literacy approach rather than a traditional approach to reading instruction. A balanced literacy classroom raised student’s attitudes by reading significantly in as little as one school year.



## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The outcomes reported from this study show that a balanced literacy approach to reading instruction positively affects student attitudes about reading more than a traditional approach to reading instruction. The findings show that there is a significant difference between student reading attitudes based on the type of instruction implemented in a classroom. The t-test results, from the 2012-2013 surveyed year, indicate that the p-value of 0.16 is much lower than the alpha level of 0.25; therefore, the null hypothesis tested is indefinitely rejected with confidence. There is a significant difference in student reading attitudes based on the approach to literacy instruction implemented in a classroom.

The conceptual underpinning of leaders in literacy education, Irene Fountas and Gay Pinnell, strongly supports these research findings. Current research explains the impact of student's overall attitudes about reading on their overall reading achievement. Effective literacy instruction, such as a balanced literacy approach, is able to foster positive attitudes about reading through authentic and purposeful reading experiences in the classroom. This will ultimately encourage low-level readers or reluctant readers to pick up a book and read voluntarily in and outside of school. If students increase their overall minutes read in a day, it is very likely that they will reach higher levels of reading achievement.

After concluding this study, there are further studies that could be conducted. A study could be performed to identify the relationship between student reading attitudes and their overall reading achievement. This research could better show the direct relationship between positive student reading attitudes increasing student overall success in reading. There could also be a district wide or nationwide study that would see if these findings are true for a district

reading program or how the United States education system is preparing students to be successful readers.

According to Willows (2008), “many administrators now recognize that the solution for teachers whose students are failing in literacy is not to buy a new program, but rather to provide opportunities for professional learning.” It is important to provide professional learning opportunities in a variety of ways to support the many different needs from teachers and their students. It is becoming more common to see literacy coaches in buildings in order to help teachers develop a deeper understanding about how to teach students to read (Silverman, 2006). Furthermore, the more support, guidance, and/or scaffolding we can provide teachers in their ability to plan and implement effective reading instruction, will greatly impact the students they work with each and everyday. It will help our nation become a step closer in closing the achievement gap and meeting the high expectations demanded by the Common Core State Standards.

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