THIRD GRADE STUDENTS’ THREE-YEAR TEST RESULT DEFICIENCIES ON
THE OHIO ACHIEVEMENT TEST IN READING

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ABSTRACT

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The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 has placed a tremendous amount of pressure on schools across the United States to perform well on state-mandated tests. One hundred percent of students must perform at the proficient level by the year 2013-2014. Therefore, it is imperative that schools identify the most effective ways to teach reading to students.

The purpose of this study was to analyze the past three years of the Ohio Grade 3 Reading Achievement Test in a rural district in Northwest Ohio. The researcher obtained preexisting data provided by the Ohio Department of Education to determine students’ performance on the reading section of the test. This information provided insight into the areas of weakness that third grade students in one elementary school possessed in regard to reading. Therefore, teachers will be better equipped to provide targeted, high quality instruction as a result of the data obtained from this study.

The results of this study showed that there have been improvements in all four subcategories of the Ohio Achievement Test from 2006 to 2008. The above and below proficient scores have shown substantial progress. However, the near proficient scores have not been as consistent. Acquisition of vocabulary, reading process, and informational text appear to be making the most improvements. Literary text seems to be a troublesome area at this grade level in this district.
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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Every student in the state of Ohio in grades three through eight is subject to achievement tests in the areas of reading and math. These tests are a result of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Schools are being held accountable for students’ achievement in these two areas and are being penalized if their students are not performing at the level specified by the state.

Many administrators and teachers are stressed as to how to obtain this goal and assist students in learning to the best of their abilities. It appears that the biggest problem is in regard to reading. Identifying areas of weakness as a district and grade level in the area of reading has been a struggle for many schools. It is critical to analyze data provided by the achievement tests to determine which areas of instruction should be targeted in the future.

Statement of the Problem

Due to the No Child Left Behind Policy of 2001, all schools must have 100% of students performing at the proficient level or above on the Ohio Achievement Test by the year 2014. This has been a difficult task for many schools. Many districts have had difficulty consistently meeting Adequate Yearly Progress and, as a result, have suffered consequences mandated by the federal government. Therefore, this is an area that needs to be addressed to make progress in the future. Administrators and teachers are working diligently to devise strategies to help students perform more successfully on these standardized tests.
Research Question

To help ascertain specific categories of difficulty for third grade students in one local school district, this research study focused on the question, “Which areas of the Ohio Achievement Test in Reading have posed the biggest challenge for third grade students in one elementary school over the past three years?” Therefore, the purpose of this study was to determine patterns that have emerged in test scores so that teachers might use the results to identify instructional techniques that could be utilized to help students perform at a higher level on the reading achievement test.

Rationale

This topic of research is critical to third grade teachers, intervention specialists, and administrators. Analyzing test results over the last three years will help determine patterns of poor test performance by third grade students in the area of reading on the end-of-the-year Ohio Achievement Test. By identifying troublesome areas, the teachers can develop lessons and activities to better meet the students’ needs.

In addition, regular education teachers can collaborate with intervention specialists about content that should be emphasized in small-group instruction. These data will hopefully help improve students’ knowledge and performance on high-stakes tests.

Furthermore, analyzing these data and presenting the findings to teachers at the building and district levels may motivate educators at other grade levels to analyze their own data. This could help them determine areas in need of improvement so they, too, can assist students to perform at the proficient level or higher on the Ohio Achievement Test.
Definition of Terms

The following terms will be used throughout this research study. This particular list of terms was created to help clarify any that may be ambiguous.

1. No Child Left Behind (NCLB)--This law was signed into effect in January of 2001 by President George W. Bush. It mandates that all public schools must have 100% of their students performing at the proficient level or above in reading and math by 2013-2014. All public schools will be held accountable for students’ performance, and consequences will be enforced for districts that do not meet the requirements set forth under this law (Cronin, Kingsbury, McCall, & Bowe, 2005).

2. Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP): Each state must devise a statewide test to determine progress towards proficiency. Test data must show that all subgroups---minorities, low socioeconomic status, special needs, and English Language Learners---are progressing towards proficiency each year in order to meet the NCLB goal of 2013-2014 (Imas, 2004).

3. Proficient: In Ohio, students must obtain a score of 400 or higher out of 517 possible points to be classified as proficient on the Ohio Grade 3 Reading Achievement Test (Ohio Department of Education, 2008).

4. High Stakes Assessment: “A test or testing program is called high-stakes when it is used to make important decisions about individual students, teachers, or schools” (Guthrie, 2007, p. 370).

5. Title I: A federal elementary and secondary education program that provides billions of dollars each year to assist students in grades K-12 in the area of
reading. The funds are for schools with a high level of student poverty (Mast, 2003).

6. Story Grammar: According to Reutzel & Cooter (2000), “Story grammar typically begins with a description of the setting or location, the introduction of the main characters, and the general time frame of the events in the story” (p. 79).

7. Decode: According to Harris and Hodges (1995) “decode means to analyze spoken or graphic symbols of a familiar language to ascertain their intended meaning” (p. 55).

8. Zone of Proximal Development: “The Zone of Proximal Development is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with capable peers (Gunning, 2008, p. 6).

9. Orthography: The study of the nature and use of symbols in a writing system (Harris and Hodges, 1995).

10. Academic Content Standards: These are objectives or goals identified by the Ohio Department of Education indicating what a child should be able to do by the end of a school year (Ohio Department of Education, 2008).

Delimitations/Limitations

One delimitation of this study was that only one grade level’s reading test results were analyzed. To assist this particular school district in meeting Adequate Yearly Progress requirements, test scores at all grade levels in the building should be analyzed to ensure school-wide progress toward meeting the No Child Left Behind goal.
Another delimitation was that only three years of test results were analyzed. Other patterns could emerge if more years were analyzed. Furthermore, this study did not incorporate the current year’s test results. Additionally, there have been numerous changes in the academic instruction in the area of reading at this school district. This study will not be able to determine if students’ scores have improved from previous years. This limits the knowledge that the third grade team will have to inform their academic instruction for the future.

An additional limitation was that the time frame to analyze the test results was restricted due to having to rely on the EMIS coordinator to retrieve the necessary data to conduct this study. A former school employee accidentally disposed of the spring test scores for the years of 2006, 2007, and 2008. Therefore, the information needed to carry out this study had to be retrieved from the EMIS coordinator. The ability to analyze the data depended on the rate at which the EMIS coordinator retrieved the necessary data. This made it difficult to access the data needed to properly analyze the information to identify common themes or patterns in students’ test performance.

A final limitation was that there have been some staff changes in the third grade team in this district in the past three years. This made it difficult to isolate areas in need of improvement in regard to instruction, since the teaching styles of the new teachers may be different from previous teachers in the area of reading.
CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This study focused on analyzing preexisting data of third grade students’ scores on the Ohio Reading Achievement Test. The Ohio Achievement Tests are mandated by the federal government and administered annually in grades three through eight to hold districts accountable and measure their progress towards meeting No Child Left Behind’s one hundred percent proficiency goal for 2013-2014. The literature review framing this study reflects the history of No Child Left Behind, sanctions for schools not meeting NCLB, and how NCLB has impacted instruction. In addition, the elements of reading are discussed since the reading achievement test concentrates on students’ reading abilities.

History of No Child Left Behind

The following section will outline the history of No Child Left Behind. Educators must understand the rationale for this act to determine how to achieve its goal.

*Elementary and Secondary Education Act*

For decades, the United States has been concerned with the education of all students as well as the methods that are utilized to ensure that they receive a quality education. In 1965, Lyndon B. Johnson signed into law the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)*, which outlined federal requirements for the country’s public schools. Schools must comply with this act if they receive some form of financial assistance under Public Law (PL) 107-110. The theory behind this act was that if needy students were provided a better education through effective instructional techniques, curriculum, and resources, then these students would be able to demonstrate academic success as well (Cronin, Kingsbury, McCall, & Bowe, 2005). This program was designed to motivate states and school districts to recognize that particular groups of students need
more attention and higher quality instruction (McDonnell, 2005). The chief components
of this act were Title I, teacher training, student literacy, school technology, and school
safety. This act is revised every five to seven years to determine its effectiveness in
providing a quality education to all students.

National Assessment of Educational Progress

In 1965, as a result of poor test scores, Congress mandated that students across the
United States would be expected to participate in periodic assessments (Valencia,
Heibert, & Kapinus, 1992). These assessments would help determine how students were
progressing and comprehending certain concepts in the areas of reading, mathematics,
science, writing, the arts, civics, economics, geography, and U.S. history. A random
selection of students in grades four and eight would be subject to these tests. Initially, test
scores were not going to be used to compare students’ performance between states.
However, in 1988 a law was passed indicating that state-by-state National Assessment of
Educational Progress (NAEP) comparisons would be occurring (Valencia, Hiebert, &
Kapinus).

Students must demonstrate the ability to read informational and literary texts on
the reading tests. The test consists of multiple choice as well as extended response
questions. The students can score in the basic, proficient, and advanced levels. Students
in the fourth grade have improved in the area of reading since the year of 1992. In 2007,
fourth graders scored two points higher than in 2005 and four points higher than in 1992
(U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Scores are disaggregated based on socioeconomic
status and ethnic background.
Nationally, students improved their performance in both reading contexts from 2005 to 2007 (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). However, some states did not show an improvement in each reading context. Score reports from 2007, when compared with the results from 2005, indicated that 6 out of the 18 states posted overall gains in both reading contexts. Nine of 34 states that showed no significant change in overall performance did show gains in reading for information. None of the 34 states showed an improvement in their scores in the literary text area (U.S. Department of Education).

*A Nation At Risk*

In 1983, the Reagan administration published *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Prior to developing this report, 18 months of study was conducted in order to create a reform policy for our educational system to ensure that all schools and colleges provide high quality education to all parties involved. Furthermore, this report was written in response to the fact that other countries were becoming highly competitive with the United States, and our position in the world was being compromised. Many indicators of risk were identified. Areas that caused concern were numerous functionally illiterate adults, a decline in SAT scores, and low academic scores in comparison to those of other nations (National Commission on Excellence in Education).

This report identified many areas in need of improvement to help teachers provide students in the United States with a higher quality education. The report indicated that teachers are not thoroughly enough prepared to provide effective instruction in the content areas. In addition, the report indicated a shortage of specialized teachers, which was posing a problem because teachers who were not highly qualified were being hired
for school positions. Furthermore, a deficiency in time spent learning was affecting students’ academic abilities. Many schools did not spend as much time on academic content areas as other nations. This caused the United States to fall further behind other countries (National Commission on Excellence in Education). However, *A Nation at Risk* was not a new federal policy. Instead, it was intended to persuade others to improve the nation’s education (McDonell, 2005).

*Improving America’s Schools Act*

In 1994, the *Improving America’s Schools Act* was implemented as a reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965*. Its purpose was to service children who fell in the low socioeconomic status bracket. Schools would receive funding from this act based on the number of students who were enrolled in the free and reduced lunch program (Billig, 1998). According to Billig, there were five key aspects of this law: (1) all students would be held accountable for mastering academic content standards; (2) there would be flexibility in the accountability design; (3) financial resources would be allocated to weakest areas; (4) schools would form partnerships with families; and (5) support systems would be encouraged to improve services to children. This act required states to devise standards in reading and math as well as assessments aligned with these standards (McDonell, 2005).

*No Child Left Behind*

On January 8, 2001, President George W. Bush signed into effect the *No Child Left Behind Act*. This act states that all schools’ students must achieve 100% proficiency by the year 2013-2014 in the areas of reading and math (Hursch, 2005). To achieve this goal, each state was mandated to develop standardized tests to assess students’ academic
abilities in the areas of reading and math in grades three through eight. By the year 2008, a science test would be added to the testing protocol, as well as testing in grades 9 through 12 (Smith, 2005). In addition to annual testing, schools were to also publicly publish the aggregated test scores for groups of students based on gender, socioeconomic status, ethnic background, and English Language Proficiency. Each state was to also develop a method for ascertaining if schools were meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) (McDonnell, 2005). AYP demonstrates that schools are progressing towards the 100% proficiency goal established for 2013-2014. All subgroups must meet AYP in order to avoid predetermined sanctions.

School districts are penalized for each year in which AYP is not met. When a district has not met AYP for two consecutive years, it enters School Improvement Status Year 1 and must implement the following: (1) develop a school improvement plan to span three years (2) immediately notify parents about status and options they have for transferring their child to another school district (3) spend not less than 10% of Title I funds on professional development (Ohio Department of Education, 2004).

If a district moves into School Improvement Status Year 2, which is not meeting AYP for three consecutive years, the same sanctions apply as School Improvement Status Year 1; however, schools must also make available supplemental educational services for low socio-economic status families (Ohio Department of Education, 2004).

Once the district is categorized as being in School Improvement Status Year 3, which occurs when AYP has not been met for four consecutive years, the school district enters the first year of Corrective Action. All of the same sanctions apply as in other School Improvement Status years. However, one of the following must be implemented:
replace school staff who are associated with failure; implement research-based curriculum; appoint an outside expert to monitor the school’s progress; extend the school day or year; decrease management authority in schools; or restructure the internal organization of the school (Ohio Department of Education, 2004).

If a district progresses into School Improvement Status Year 4, which results after not meeting AYP for five consecutive years, all previous sanctions apply, as well as one of the following: (1) open school as public charter school (2) replace all or most of staff or (3) the Ohio Department of Education assumes control of the school or makes arrangements with a private company to monitor progress.

If a district progresses into School Improvement Status Year 5, which means not meeting AYP for six consecutive years, all sanctions from School Improvement Status Year 5 apply (Ohio Department of Education, 2004).

Ohio Grade 3 Reading Achievement Test

As a result of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, each state must assess students’ achievement in the areas of reading and math in grades three through eight. This test is given to third grade students across the state of Ohio each fall and spring to assess their achievement. The reading achievement test assesses students’ knowledge in the areas of vocabulary, informational text, literary text, and the reading process associated with Ohio’s Academic Content Standards for Language Arts.

Third grade students demonstrate their knowledge of these four areas through reading four passages of varying length. There are two literary text (short and long) passages and two informational text (short and long) passages. The longer passages contain 351-500 words and assess the reading process, literary, informational, and
vocabulary standards. Each of the longer passages contains six to eight multiple choice questions, one short answer, and one extended response question. The short passages consist of a maximum of 350 words and assess the reading process, literary, informational, and vocabulary standards. There are approximately 8 to 11 multiple choice questions, up to four short answer questions, and up to two extended response questions on each passage. In addition, students are required to answer five multiple choice vocabulary questions that are presented in isolation. Therefore, there are a total of 36 or 37 items on the test and a total of 49 points that can be earned (Ohio Department of Education, 2005).

Students obtain a score in one of five categories. Students may receive a score in the limited, basic, proficient, accelerated, or advanced categories. The limited range (255-384) means that the student can identify new words, but does not understand the words’ meanings when read in texts. Therefore, these particular students struggle with reading. Students in the basic range (385-399) are beginning to learn how to use clues in the text to understand new words, but they sometimes have difficulty understanding what they read. Proficient students (400-414) understand what they read and are also able to use clues to determine unknown words. Students in the accelerated range (415-431) understand a text’s organizational structure and understand what they read. The advanced category (432-517) means that students thoroughly understand the text and can make judgments about what they read (Ohio Department of Education, 2008).

Acquisition of vocabulary, informational text, literary text, and reading process will be discussed in the upcoming sections to gain a better understanding of what is expected of third grade students on this particular achievement test.
According to the Ohio Grade 3 Reading Achievement Test, acquisition of vocabulary means that students are able to utilize clues in texts and knowledge of words and their parts to learn the meanings of new words (Ohio Department of Education, 2006). However, this description does not fully encompass the meaning of vocabulary knowledge nor does it explain how students acquire an extensive vocabulary base.

According to Lubliner and Scott (2008), students possess, on average, a vocabulary of 4,000-5,000 base words upon entering kindergarten. Graves and Watts-Taffe (2007) stated that each year students acquire approximately 3,000-4,000 new vocabulary words. This means that students need to learn roughly 10 words per day to make adequate progress towards this goal (Stahl & Nagy, 2007). Furthermore, many students enter school lacking the oral vocabulary that other children possess. Without explicit (direct) and implicit (indirect) instruction in the classroom, these students will fall further behind, therefore, perpetuating the Matthew Effect, which suggests that the rich get richer, while the poor get poorer.

It is not feasible for an educator to directly teach a child 3,000 - 4,000 new terms in a year. Therefore, to meet the diverse needs of all of the students in a classroom setting, the teacher must explicitly and implicitly teach vocabulary to expose students to terms both receptively and expressively (Graves, 2006). One’s vocabulary consists of speaking, writing, reading, and listening. These four vocabularies are classified into two categories. The reading and listening vocabularies are part of the receptive vocabularies. Speaking and writing are classified as the expressive vocabularies (Hiebert & Kamil, 2005).
Implicit instruction relies heavily on the child’s ability to obtain new words through independent reading and being read aloud to daily. Reading aloud to children presents new vocabulary terms in context and also encourages a discussion of the meanings of the words. Rich discussion also leads to students being exposed to more words than conventional discourse (Lubliner & Scott, 2008). Hence, “rich oral language is the foundation and the most important component of the vocabulary curriculum” (Lubliner & Scott, p. 72).

In addition, wide or extensive reading (Peterson & Eeds, 2007) of multiple genres exposes children to words that they would not normally encounter while conversing with others. This is due to the fact that the types of vocabulary found in books tend to be more advanced than the oral vocabularies children possess (Blachowicz & Fisher, 2007). Thus, wide or extensive reading helps increase the number of words that children learn and, as a result, makes it easier for them to comprehend future texts, which increases their motivation to read.

Explicit (direct) instruction or intensive reading (Peterson & Eeds, 2007) can appear in numerous fashions in the classroom. First, multiple exposures to words will help children acquire a deeper understanding of a term. According to Nagy (1988), it takes approximately 7 to 12 exposures to a word before a child takes complete ownership of the word and its meaning. These exposures should not manifest themselves solely in a definitional setting, which is when words are presented in list format and students are expected to locate a word’s definition from the dictionary. Graves (2006) believes that giving students a set of words and their definitions—only serves to teach the basic meanings of the words. This will not result in learning rich and full meanings or
improving comprehension. Therefore, it is vital that students experience words both in the definitional and contextual sense with guided instruction from the teacher. Additionally, reading words in context can help to clarify the meaning of a new term. Clearly, vocabulary instruction plays a significant role in comprehending the texts being read. In order for students to acquire the number of vocabulary words necessary each year to excel in school and life, explicit and implicit instruction must be employed and extensive reading must take place.

Informational Text

According to the Ohio Grade 3 Reading Achievement Test, informational texts consist of the ability to use text features (titles, index) and content (main ideas, details) to understand informational texts (nonfiction, maps, instructions) (Ohio Department of Education, 2006). Research in regard to informational text will be addressed in this section.

Expository texts, often referred to as informational or nonfiction texts, convey factual information in relation to a specific topic. Many children arrive at school possessing background knowledge about the concept of story and how to comprehend basic story elements. However, this is not true in regard to expository texts (Block, Rodgers, & Johnson, 2004). According to Hall, Sabey, and McClellan (2005), instruction in expository text is limited in the primary grades. Duke (2000) conducted a study in first grade classrooms about the use of informational text. She discovered that these classrooms, on average, spent only 3.6 minutes per day engaging in reading informational texts, and this number was substantially lower in low socioeconomic-status classrooms. This is unfortunate, since informational literacy is critical to the overall success in
subsequent grades, the workforce, and the community (Duke). In addition, when students enter the fourth grade and above, they may experience difficulties in the content areas due to a lack of exposure to informational texts in the primary grades.

Informational texts tend to be neglected in the early grades due to the fact that students’ primary experiences upon entering school are based on narrative texts, in which the vocabulary resembles oral language (Feathers, 2004). Often times, authors adopt a narrative structure for their texts to convey factual information because it is easier for students to understand (Freeman & Person, 1998). Furthermore, the structure, or format, of nonfiction texts is more complex than narrative texts, indicating the need for direct instruction in this area (Kay & Duke, 1998). Therefore, “Students should be taught explicitly how to recognize and use expository text structure to improve comprehension and recall” (Dymock, 2005, p. 177). These text structures, which refer to the organization of ideas in a text, are comprised of a variety of formats including description, compare-contrast, cause-effect, and problem-solution (Williams, 2005). According to Montelongo, Berber-Jimenez, Hernandez and Hosking (2006), “The recognition of an organizational pattern enables the student to form a mental representation of the information” (p. 29). Consequently, this can help improve comprehension. Most students have not been exposed to these types of texts prior to entering school, so it is imperative that teachers provide experiences with and instruction in navigating expository texts, as well as use this genre during the read aloud experience.

**Literary Texts**

The Ohio Grade 3 Reading Achievement Test states that narrative texts include identifying literary elements (plot, character, setting, theme), and recognizing and
explaining different types of texts (folk tales, poems etc.) (Ohio Department of Education, 2006). Research in regard to narrative text will be discussed in this section.

Students are relatively aware of literary (narrative) texts upon entering school due to its resemblance to oral language (Reutzel & Cooter, 2000). Typically, parents have a tendency to read more storybooks to their children as opposed to informational books, which provides more exposure to narrative text structure (Feathers, 2004). Narrative text structure follows a format known as story grammar (Feathers). According to Reutzel and Cooter (2000), “Story grammar typically begins with a description of the setting or location, the introduction of the main characters, and the general time frame of the events in the story” (p. 79).

In addition, narrative texts are usually written in the first or third person, contain fewer content-specific words than informational texts, and typically contain only one text structure, which is a sequence of causally related events (Feathers, 2004). This assists children in comprehension because the stories often are similar to the type of oral discourse they are accustomed to, and contain a predictable pattern as well.

Reading Process

The Ohio Grade 3 Reading Achievement Test states that the reading process consists of making predictions, comparing and contrasting, and summarizing to comprehend what has been read. Students should also check their understanding while reading (Ohio Department of Education, 2006).

The reading process consists of multiple layers in regard to monitoring understanding while reading. The major focus of teaching students the process of reading is to enable them to develop metacognitive strategies. Pressley (2002) explains,
“Metacognition is the knowledge of thinking processes, both knowledge of the thinking occurring in the here and now, and in the long term” (p. 291). In simple terms, metacognition is the reader’s awareness that he/she possesses strategies that aid understanding and that he/she is capable of consciously employing them as necessary while reading (Weaver, 2002). While students are in the process of short-term reading, they should be able to monitor their understanding as they proceed by applying “fix-it” strategies when comprehension has been compromised, as well as asking if what is being read makes sense. The long-term forms of metacognition consist of the knowledge of comprehension strategies, which are predicting, constructing images, inferencing, and summarizing information that has been read (Pressley).

Ohio Achievement Test Format

The Ohio Department of Education has a fairness and sensitivity committee to view possible text questions prior to field-testing and then the group analyzes the results upon completion of field-testing. This process helps to eliminate any questions that may affect various cultures of students. Only questions that have been reviewed, field tested, and approved may be used on the achievement tests (Ohio Department of Education, 2008).

Test Taking Skills

Students need to be taught test taking skills/strategies to ensure success on standardized tests. There have been instances where tests did not reflect the knowledge a child truly possessed due to the child not knowing how to take the test (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1992). Therefore, students need to be taught the format of tests and what is to be expected from their performance. Test taking skills should be embedded into
students’ daily learning (Durham, 2007). Students can be taught how to carefully read
directions, correctly bubble in answers, and perform process of elimination of answers
when unsure of the correct answer. Time can be wasted while taking a test if a student
does not know how to fill in an answer or take an educated guess. Hence, pacing needs to
be taught to students, so as many questions can be answered as possible (Durham).
Students only receive two-and-a-half hours to complete the Ohio Achievement Test. If a
student exhausts too much time on questions that he/she finds problematic, that child may
not complete the entire test, and as a result, have a score that does not reflect his/her true
capabilities.

Theoretical Frameworks for Reading

There have been three main theories in regard to the reading process and how
students acquire the reading skills necessary to be successful readers. Whether the top-
down approach (manifested in whole language approaches to teaching) or the bottom-up
method (apparent in phonics-based approaches to reading), or the interactive method is
best for teaching reading has been an on-going debate for numerous years. Many studies
have been conducted to determine which theoretical orientation and, hence, approach, to
teaching produces the best results.

The Bottom-Up Model

The bottom-up theory asserts that children literally begin from the bottom and
work their way up when reading a text (Gunning, 2008). According to Gunning,
“Children begin learning the names and shapes of the letters of the alphabet. Next,
students learn consonant sounds, followed by simple and then more complex vowel
correspondences” (p. 9). The bottom-up theory is implemented in phonics approaches to
The main goal of phonics instruction is to assist students in acquiring the alphabetic principle (Villaume & Brabham, 2003). According to Gunning (2008), the alphabetic principle is the knowledge that speech sounds are represented by letters. As children’s knowledge of the alphabetic principle expands, they will be able to include more orthographic elements such as consonant blends, consonant digraphs, vowel digraphs, diphthongs, and phonograms (Stahl, Duffy-Hester, & Dougherty-Stahl, 1998). Utilizing the alphabetic principle facilitates students’ ability to identify unknown words. As a result of having strong word recognition skills, students will be able to devote more time to reading comprehension (Villaume & Brabham).

According to Stahl (1992), “Phonics refers to various approaches designed to teach children about the orthographic code of the language and the relationships of spelling patterns to sound patterns” (p. 618). This indicates that children are able to use spelling patterns to sound out words to pronounce the word correctly. A variety of methods of instruction can be used, ranging from direct instruction in leveled reading texts (basals) to instruction rooted in the reading of literature (Stahl). Therefore, the instruction of phonics in the classroom has been a controversial issue for several years (Morrow & Tracey, 1997). Recently, the topic of discussion has shifted from whether or not phonics instruction is important to which approaches to teaching phonics are the most successful (Morrow & Tracey).

Furthermore, phonics instruction should not be the sole aspect of reading instruction. The ultimate goal of reading instruction is not to create students who robotically decode words, but to guide students who comprehend and interpret the author’s words and reflect on what they have read (Heide, 2005).
The Top-Down Model

According to Gunning (2008), whole language entails the idea that children learn to read and write similarly to how they learn to speak. It occurs naturally within the context of real-life (Weaver 1990). The top-down theory, which is the foundation of whole language approaches to reading, focuses on teaching students how to read for meaning in an authentic setting (Weaver). Students participate in reading and writing activities that are meaningful to them and not broken into isolated skills. However, this does not mean that phonics instruction is not incorporated into whole language (Newman & Church, 1990). Direct instruction of phonics occurs when children demonstrate readiness for learning the specific skill. This means that the student is having difficulty with that particular skill while reading, or is attempting to use the skill in the writing process (Weaver, 2002).

Furthermore, whole language may appear differently in each classroom. This type of instruction does not follow a predetermined path. Whole language is opposed to the idea of utilizing basal series in the classroom, and instead encourages teachers to use students’ interests as a motivating factor for engaging in authentic learning experiences (Froese, 1991).

In 1976, Kenneth and Yetta Gooman presented a talk at the University of Pittsburgh advocating the use of whole language in the classroom (Stahl, McKenna, & Pagnucco, 1994). However, the Goodman’s did not create this theory. Instead, this theory has evolved over the years and encompasses many researchers’ ideas.
An interactive model of reading combines both the top-down and bottom-up theories. This theory suggests that there should be a balance between both of the previous theories mentioned to provide students with the most effective instruction. Gunning (2008) states, “Skill instruction is strongly balanced with holistic reading and writing, with students reading and experiencing substantial authentic literature and other texts that make sense for them to be reading given their needs” (p. 9).

**Comprehension**

Comprehension is a complex process that focuses on constructing meaning from what has been read. There have been multiple theories as to the most effective way to teach this skill. One well-known theory is the schema theory, created by Frederic Charles Bartlett in 1932. “A schema can be thought of as a knowledge structure, or framework, which interrelates all of one’s knowledge about a given topic. Prior knowledge, organized in schemata, in turn influences the form and content of new knowledge” (Richgels, 2001, p. 54). Upon the retrieval of schema, the reader attempts to assimilate new information with preexisting information stored in his/her brain (Foos, 2001). Therefore, teachers must activate students’ background knowledge when introducing a new concept to students. Teachers must find out the knowledge that students already possess as well as build children’s background knowledge, since it is the foundation for higher-level comprehension (Gunning, 2008). Students must also learn to activate their own background knowledge about a topic prior to reading.

The sociocultural theory is another theory in regard to comprehension. It originated with Lev Vygotsky in 1978, who theorized that all learners operate within a
Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) when acquiring new information (Scharlach, 2008). “The Zone of Proximal Development is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with capable peers (Gunning, 2008, p. 6). Therefore, teachers should scaffold a student’s learning through providing support or help while reading. After the teacher has modeled how to use reading strategies, as well as facilitated the child’s use of the strategies, the scaffolding diminishes and the child is left to employ these strategies independently.

According to Guthrie (2007), reading comprehension develops through utilizing a variety of purposeful, motivating reading activities. Therefore, teaching comprehension strategies in isolation is not effective. Strategies must be embedded in meaningful literary experiences if teachers are to effectively instruct students in how to be skilled at comprehending material (Scharlach, 2008). As a result, direct instruction on how to employ reading strategies is beneficial to their overall reading success. It has been suggested that students perform before, during, and after reading strategies to fully comprehend the text. During the before reading phase, the child should engage in setting goals for the reading event, make predictions, activate background knowledge, and skim the text to identify important information as well as text structure (Williams, 2002). Making predictions helps set goals for reading as well as help the child to be actively involved in the reading process (Reutzel & Cooter, 2000).

While students are reading, they should visualize the information in the text, make connections to their own lives, and ask mental questions about the material (Scharlach,
Making a mental picture helps students activate background knowledge as well as make inferences about information not explicitly stated in the text (Neufeld, 2005). Successful readers attempt to relate experiences that they have had with information presented in the text. This fosters a deeper understanding of the material being read. Furthermore, it is important for a reader to question content while reading. This enables the reader to be an active participant and monitor his/her own understanding of what is being read (Neufeld). In the final stages of reading, the child should participate in a discussion of the text with others, check their predictions that were made as well as summarize the main points of the text (Scharlach, 2008). According to Block and Pressley (2007), completing worksheets upon completion of reading a text is not an effective way to foster excellent comprehension.

**Summary**

Many theories exist in regard to the most effective way to teach the complex process of reading, including the bottom-up, top-down, and interactive theories. Regardless of the approach implemented in the classroom, both explicit and implicit instruction should be utilized in the classroom setting. Teachers must identify the forms of instruction necessary for the task at hand and capitalize on the instructional time provided. Furthermore, students must acquire a breadth of vocabulary, but most importantly, a depth of understanding of the words learned. Vocabulary is most effectively acquired through wide or extensive reading. Reading a variety of genres can expose students to a multitude of terms. In addition, it is important that teachers expose students to both literary and informational texts and teach them the strategies necessary to comprehend the texts, as well as monitor their own thinking.
Acquisition of vocabulary, reading process, literary text, and informational text are all areas that are tested on the annual Ohio Grade 3 Reading Achievement Test. Instruction in all four of these areas is essential to the students’ overall success. However, teachers must also familiarize students with test taking strategies. A lack of knowledge in this area could hinder a child’s success, as well as mask his/her true academic capabilities.
CHAPTER III. METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study was to analyze third grade reading Ohio Achievement Test results from the years 2006-2008 in one elementary school building in a district in Northwest Ohio. The research question guiding this study was: Which areas of the Ohio Achievement Test in Reading have posed the biggest challenge for third grade students in one elementary school building over the past three years? In this chapter, the methodology of the study will be discussed, as well as the research design, participants, instrumentation, procedures for data collection, and data analysis.

Methods

Research Design

Preexisting data utilizing a longitudinal approach was used for this study. The researcher analyzed data that has been collected over time, but did not track the same students’ progress over an extended period of time. Therefore, this study did not meet all of the criteria necessary to be classified as a longitudinal study, though it is similar in its approach. The preexisting data were analyzed for trends/patterns that developed over a period of three years on the Ohio Grade 3 Reading Achievement Test. This specific study was conducted using preexisting data from the scores of the reading Ohio Achievement Test mandated by the Ohio Department of Education. The results were analyzed from the spring test results in the years 2006, 2007, and 2008.

Participants

The school district used to conduct this study is a rural district in Northwest Ohio. The district services 1,601 students in two elementary buildings, one middle school, and one high school. The elementary school that was utilized for this study services a total of
496 students in grades two through five. The ethnic backgrounds of students consist of 2.1% African Americans, 6.2% Hispanics, 4.3% multiracial students, 86.4% white students, 25.7% economically disadvantaged, 12.5% students with disabilities, and 0.0% Limited English Proficient. The median household income for residents in this vicinity in 2007 was $61,400. The population for this study was the third grade, which consists of approximately 126 students, as well as six third grade teachers, and one teacher of students who have special needs.

In order to conduct this study, preexisting data constituting a total of 374 student scores from the past three years on the Ohio Grade 3 Reading Achievement Test were analyzed: 127 student scores from 2006; 120 from 2007; and 127 from 2008. Due to the fact that preexisting data was utilized, it was not necessary to recruit the assistance of individual participants to gather data.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation used throughout the course of this study was the Ohio Achievement Test results from the spring of 2006, 2007, and 2008. The Ohio Achievement Test reports results on four subcategories: literary text, informational text, acquisition of vocabulary, and reading process. This specific achievement test must be administered in one session. Students are allotted a total of two-and-a-half hours to complete the third grade reading achievement test. Examples of sample test questions taken directly from the Ohio Achievement Test as found on the Ohio Department of Education’s website (2008) are as follows

1. What is the theme of this reading selection?
   a. It is important to have a snack after school.
b. It is hard but rewarding to work in a garden.

c. It is fun to listen to stories from a long time ago.

2. This sentence is from the selection. “I ask Grandma Lena if the radio was boring, and she tells me that people thought it was fantastic.” What does fantastic mean?

a. all right

b. terrific

c. serious

3. The reading selection, “Grandma Lena’s Radio,” is a

a. poem.

b. fairy tale.

c. story.

**Procedures**

*Data Collection*

Preexisting data were utilized to conduct this study. The data for all three years were collected from CD files provided by the Ohio Department of Education. Only certain employees at each district are granted permission to access this data. Therefore, the Education Management Information System (EMIS) coordinator for this district accessed the data for these three school years in order to assist the researcher.

All of the data collected provided information on students’ scores for each of the four subcategories: informational text, literary text, acquisition of vocabulary, and reading process. The EMIS coordinator provided the researcher with the necessary data from the testing years of 2006, 2007, and 2008, which was available on the school’s CD-
The building principal was present when the data were presented to the researcher. The students’ names, school ID numbers, as well as teachers’ names were removed from the data sheets. The principal accompanied the researcher to the storage room to shred all of the identifiable data. This was to ensure that all students and teachers remain anonymous. The remaining data listed students’ test scores and proceeded to break the information down into the four subcategories. The four subcategories were listed across the top of the page, and below each section was a coded symbol system. A “plus” (+) indicated that the child was above proficient in a category, an “asterisk” (*) represented that the student was near proficient in an area, and a “minus” (-) indicated that the child scored below proficient in that specific area.

Appendices A, B, and C contain the data results from the Ohio Grade 3 Reading Achievement Test for the years 2006, 2007, and 2008. The data provides information for third grade students only in the assigned elementary building. These reports were provided by the Ohio Department of Education.

Data Analysis

An organizational system was necessary to identify patterns in the students’ reading performance over the last three years on the achievement test. Tables were created for each testing year. The four subcategories were listed down the left column of the table. The above proficient, near proficient, and below proficient labels were written across the top of the table. The researcher proceeded to carefully go through each year’s data. Using tallies, she recorded each student who received an above proficient, near proficient, or below proficient rating in each of the four subcategories. After each child’s rating was recorded in the appropriate section, the researcher counted the total number of
students who scored above proficient, near proficient, and below proficient in each of the four subcategories. The total number of students counted in each section was converted to percentages. The percentages were calculated by dividing the number of students counted in each section by the total number of students who took the test that year.

After the tables were constructed for each year, the data was transferred to graphs to compare the data and determine patterns that may have evolved over time. The Create-A-Graph website (http://nces.ed.gov/nceskids/createagraph/default.aspx) was used as a graphic tool to organize the results from the tables. A line graph was constructed for each subcategory on the Ohio Achievement Test. Each graph displayed the three years being analyzed, as well as the number of students who scored above, near, or below proficient on each section. The years of 2006, 2007, and 2008 were written along the x-axis and percentage of students was written along the y-axis. Three separate lines were recorded on each line graph to represent the students that scored above proficient, near proficient, and below proficient. The researcher analyzed the four line graphs to identify patterns of weakness that may have emerged over the past three years.

No information was available on the Ohio Department of Education’s website to indicate how the Ohio Grade 3 Academic Content Standards are aligned with the Ohio Grade 3 Reading Achievement Test. However, the researcher viewed released test items and viewed the Ohio Grade 3 Academic Content Standards. It appears that the test is aligned with the academic content standards. However, the presentation of the test varies from year-to-year, which may pose difficulties for students since the format is not consistent.
Summary

The data used for this study were ascertained from CD-ROMS provided by the Ohio Department of Education. Utilizing the results from the past three years on the Ohio Grade 3 Reading Achievement Test helped the researcher determine areas that may be in need of improvement in instruction for third grade students in one rural northwest Ohio school. The results were displayed in graphic format to analyze trends in the data.
CHAPTER IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This investigation examined the past three years of the Ohio Grade 3 Reading Achievements test results for one building in a rural school district in Northwest Ohio. The test results were obtained from the EMIS coordinator in the district, and scores on the following test elements were analyzed: acquisition of vocabulary, reading process, informational text, and literary text. The researcher analyzed spring test results for the years of 2006, 2007, and 2008 by creating a table for each year to organize the data into categories based on the four subcategories of the Ohio Achievement Test and to tally how many students scored above proficient, near proficient, and below proficient in each of these areas. Refer to appendices A, B, and C to view these tables. Upon completion of the tables, each subcategory’s tallied results were converted to percentages. For the year 2006, the scores were changed by dividing the number of students in each section by the total of 127 students who took the test. For 2007, the percentages were calculated by dividing the total in each section by the total of 120 students who took the test. Scores from 2008 the scores were converted by taking the number of students in each section and dividing it by the total of 127 students who took the test.

Upon completion of tallying all data, line graphs were created to visually display the results. One graph was created for each subcategory of the Ohio Achievement Test. Refer to appendices D through G to view these graphs. The subsections were acquisition of vocabulary, reading process, informational text, and literary text. In addition, each line graph displayed the years 2006, 2007, 2008 along the x-axis and the y-axis showed the percentage of students. There were a total of three lines on each graph. One line represented the percentage of students who scored above proficient, near proficient, and
below proficient. This allowed the researcher to track how the students’ scores improved or declined over the past three years. The researcher examined how each line on the graph changed over the course of the three years. The changes were recorded and compared to determine which area(s) appear to be the most problematic.

Acquisition of Vocabulary

In the area of Acquisition of Vocabulary, the number of third grade students in the above proficient category has shown improvement. In 2006 48% of the 127 students tested scored above proficient, which jumped to 62% of the 120 students tested in 2007, and remained comparable in 2008 with 60% of 127 students tested scoring above proficient. The near proficient scores have exhibited changes as well from 2006 to 2008. In 2006, 33% of students scored in the near proficient range; in 2007, 34% of students scored near proficient, but the scores declined to 29% near proficient in 2008. The below proficient scores improved from 2006 (19% of students) to 2007 (only 4% of students), but rose in 2008 to 11% of students scoring below proficient. This graph can be viewed in Appendix D.

Reading Process

In the area of Reading Process, the students in the above proficient category continuously improved from 2006 to 2008. In 2006, 44% of students were above proficient, which jumped to 56% of students in 2007, and increased to 61% in 2008. Students in the near proficient category improved from 2006 (27% of students) to 2007 (35% of students), but dropped to only 26% of students near proficient in 2008. In the below proficient area, students’ scores improved from 2006 (29% of students) to 2007
(9% of students), but rose to 13% of students below proficient in 2008. This graph can be viewed in Appendix E.

**Informational Text**

In the area of Informational Text, students in the above proficient category improved from 39% of students in 2006 to 65% of students in 2007, but declined to 52% of students scoring above proficient in 2008. Students in the near proficient category declined from 37% of students in 2006 to 29% of students in 2007, but increased to 34% of students in 2008. Students in the below proficient area improved from 24% of students in 2006 to 6% of students in 2007, but rose to 14% of students in 2008. This graph can be viewed in Appendix F.

**Literary Text**

In the area of Literary Text, the number of students in the above proficient category improved from 28% of students in 2006 to 59% of students in 2007, but declined to 35% of students in 2008. The number of students in the near proficient area declined from 42% of students in 2006 to 34% of students in 2007, but increased to 50% of students in 2008. The number of students in the below proficient area improved from 30% of students in 2006 to 7% of students in 2007, but rose to 15% of students in 2008. This graph can be viewed in Appendix G.

**Discussion of Results**

As a result of analyzing each line graph based on the subsections of the Ohio Achievement Test, no definite patterns of weakness have emerged. However, it appears that students’ scores have increased substantially in the above and below proficient areas since 2006. In 2007 students’ scores had considerably improved from the scores of 2006.
However, in 2008 students’ scores declined, but were still higher than they were in 2006. In addition, the below proficient scores have shown a great deal of improvement over the last three years.

However, there was a discrepancy in the results on the Literary Text portion of the Ohio Achievement Test. There was major improvement between the years of 2006 and 2007 in regard to the percentage of students who scored above proficient and below proficient. However, in the above proficient category, the scores plummeted from 59% in 2007 to 35% in 2008. While the percentage of students in the above proficient category in 2008 is still higher than in 2006, it dropped off substantially in 2008 compared to the scores in 2007. This appears to be an area of concern for this district.

These data suggests some reasons why there could be inconsistencies in student performance from 2006 to 2008. The ability level of students could have been higher in the year of 2007 compared to 2006 and 2008. Also, in 2006 the third grade students took the Ohio Achievement Test in March. However, in 2007 and 2008 students took the test in May. This provided an extra two months of instruction, which could also have affected test performance.

Furthermore, there was a staff change in the third grade team in 2006. The district hired a recent college graduate to fill the available position. This teacher was not familiar with the Ohio Achievement Test and what is expected of children in the third grade. This could have affected test results this year due to the fact that this teacher was unsure of how to prepare her students on test-taking skills or material that would be tested.

In 2007, two third grade teachers in this district began working on obtaining their master’s degree in reading. Both teachers shared research and reading ideas with the
other third grade teachers in this building. All six third grade teachers began focusing on tapping into students’ background knowledge, making predictions, making connections, and using higher-level vocabulary while providing instruction. These changes in instructional techniques could have impacted students’ scores as well.

In 2007, as a result of being in School Improvement Status, the district advised its teachers to begin focusing instruction on students who scored in the basic and limited ranges on the fall Ohio Achievement Test. This directive was given as a result of not meeting adequate yearly progress and the 100% proficiency goal set forth by the No Child Left Behind Policy. Differentiated instruction became a major component in classrooms and low performing students became the main focus. The data demonstrates that the below proficient student scores substantially increased from 2006 to 2007. This could be a result of the directive made by the administration in this particular district. However, the near proficient scores have not shown much improvement over the past three years.

Summary

Overall, it appears that students’ scores in the above proficient, near proficient, and below proficient range in each of the four subsections of the Ohio Achievement Test are continuously changing each year. No definite patterns have emerged as being a weakness for third grade students in this district, but literary text appears to be the area that is in most need of improvement. In addition, the below proficient students have made substantial growth from 2006 to 2008.
CHAPTER V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Today’s educators are faced with the challenge of meeting the No Child Left Behind goal for the years 2013-2014. This goal requires that 100% of students pass the Ohio Achievement Tests in the areas of reading and math. Schools are having difficulty meeting AYP to successfully adhere to the provisions outlined by NCLB. Teachers and administrators are working diligently to identify the most effective teaching practices to ensure that all students perform to their fullest potential and are successful on the achievement tests administered by each state. Chapter five summarizes the study, draws conclusions from the data, and provides recommendations based on the findings.

Summary

This study investigated the Ohio Grade 3 Reading Achievement Test results from a three-year period in one elementary school building in a rural school district in Northwest Ohio. This particular school district has had difficulty meeting AYP over the past four years. The district currently is in School Improvement Status 2 and in need of meeting AYP on the upcoming year’s Ohio Achievement Tests. Therefore, spring test results for reading in grade three were retrieved for the years of 2006, 2007, and 2008 in hopes of identifying areas of weakness to inform future reading instruction.

The EMIS coordinator for the school district retrieved the preexisting data from CD-ROMS that were provided by the Ohio Department of Education. All identifiable data had to be removed to ensure that all participants remained anonymous. The next step was to construct tally tables to organize the number of students who performed above proficient, near proficient, and below proficient in each of the four subcategories of the Ohio Achievement Test (Appendices A, B, and C). After completing the tally tables,
percentages were calculated, and line graphs were then constructed to demonstrate the data in an organized, visual format (Appendices D, E, F, G). These line graphs were then analyzed to determine areas that may be in need of improvement with the third grade reading curriculum. The researcher examined the number of students scoring in the above, near, and proficient ranges for each subcategory on the Ohio Achievement Test. The researcher attempted to draw conclusions based on whether scores improved or decreased each year in each of these subcategories.

Conclusions

The conclusions found in this study have been determined as a result of examining data over the past three years in regard to students’ performance on the Ohio Grade 3 Reading Achievement Test.

Three years of test results did not provide enough data to make a solid finding on which area is posing the most difficulty for third grade students in this district. More years need to be analyzed to accurately identify areas that are in need of improvement.

Furthermore, the results of this data did not isolate areas in which each third grade teacher needs to focus instruction. As a result of analyzing the entire third grade’s test scores, it was difficult to determine areas in which specific teachers may need help in refining instructional techniques.

In addition, the directive provided by this district appears to have been successful in assisting the below proficient students to perform better on the Ohio Achievement Test; however, it may have negatively impacted the near proficient group of students who did not make as much progress, perhaps because a majority of teacher’s instructional time was spent assisting struggling students.
Moreover, the data demonstrated that literary text had the most inconsistencies in regard to students’ performance, and this suggests that instruction has not been emphasized as strongly in this area. Because literary text appears to be the test area needing the most improvement, targeted instruction may be necessary to enhance test scores. Also, it appears that the near proficient students are not making as many academic gains compared to the above and below proficient students.

Recommendations

Upon completion of this study, several recommendations can be made in regard to future academic instruction in the area of reading.

Teachers

Neither the NCLB policy nor the Ohio Grade 3 Reading Achievement Tests are going to disappear any time in the near future. It is critical for teachers to be up-to-date on the most effective reading instructional practices to ensure their students’ success on these high-stakes tests. The following recommendations will be based on each of the four subcategories for the Ohio Achievement Test. Assisting the above proficient, near proficient, and below proficient students will be discussed as well.

Reading Process

According to the Ohio Grade 3 Reading Achievement Test, the reading process deals with the ability to make inferences, summarize texts, make predictions, and compare and contrast information. For students to successfully apply these skills, they need to be metacognitive. Pressley (2002) explains, “Metacognition is the knowledge of thinking processes, both knowledge of the thinking occurring in the here and now, and in the long term” (p. 291). Teachers must be taught how to understand their own
metacognitive awareness of reading processes prior to attempting to teach students about metacognition (Pressley). Teachers can model their own thinking processes aloud to students. Educators may demonstrate how they apply fix-it strategies when encountering an unfamiliar vocabulary term, or when comprehension has been compromised. Providing this type of modeling in meaningful contexts will encourage students to utilize the same strategy while reading independently. This will be beneficial for the students who are scoring in the near and below proficient areas. Strong readers typically are aware of their own thinking. However, struggling readers need more assistance. Modeling metacognitive strategies for these students in whole group and small group settings may assist the students in internalizing this skill.

In addition, while teachers are conducting read alouds to their students, modeling how to make predictions will be beneficial to help students set a purpose for reading. Predicting can be modeled before and during reading. Modeling how to use the pictures, as well as the text to make predictions will encourage students to utilize this skill while reading independently. Teachers should also model how to infer, summarize, and compare and contrast information. Inferring and summarizing are higher-level skills and therefore need to be modeled and taught on a regular basis. Teachers can have students use Venn diagrams, as well as charts to practice comparing and contrasting both literary and informational texts.

Acquisition of Vocabulary

Students in this district currently participate in Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) each day. This promotes the concept of wide reading in the classroom, which exposes students to more vocabulary terms. Teachers in this district should continue to expose
students to a variety of genres and encourage them to select a variety of reading materials to read during SSR. Read alouds can help expose students to genres as well. Different vocabulary is used in each genre to convey the information to the reader. These vocabulary terms will help improve students’ comprehension, but also assist them in their writing of genres as well. Teachers can also recommend books for students to read, check books out from the library based on students’ interests, and provide students with the opportunity to share books that they find intriguing. Graves and Watts-Taffe (2007) state that students acquire approximately 3,000-4,000 new vocabulary words each year. It is unrealistic to expect teachers to teach students thousands of terms in depth each year. Promoting wide reading will help students acquire a larger vocabulary base. The students will also be exposed to prefixes, suffixes, homophones and other types of terms often tested on the Ohio Achievement Test. This type of reading will help provide the students a context in which to learn the new terms and therefore will make the learning more authentic and meaningful.

Direct instruction will also help students with their vocabulary development. According to Nagy (1988), it takes approximately 7 to 12 exposures to a word before a child takes complete ownership of the word and its meaning. Teachers in this district should select important vocabulary from nonfiction, as well as literary text passages that will aid the overall comprehension of the content in the passage. These words should be introduced prior to reading the selection. Concrete examples should be provided to facilitate the understanding of the word’s meaning. Other students in the class could explain what they know about the word, helping to tap into background knowledge. Vocabulary boxes could also be utilized to demonstrate the word with a definition,
sample sentence, and illustration. Furthermore, these words could be added to a word wall for future use. Teachers should use these words as often as possible in discourse with students. Eventually, these words will transfer from the child’s receptive vocabulary to expressive vocabulary. Once this occurs, the child has acquired a deeper understanding of the term.

Literary Text

Reutzel and Cooter (2000) state that students typically enter school with an awareness of literary (narrative texts) and have more difficulty with informational text. However, it appears that the teachers in the school district may place a greater emphasis on other subcategories.

A suggestion for teachers would be to make story writing and reading fun and engaging. One way to do this is to have students create their own digital storytelling videos of their own life. This building has access to iMovie, which could be used to create the digital storytelling videos. Through this type of project, students will learn the importance of developing a clear beginning, middle, and end and sequencing events to make the story clear to the audience. This supports what is expected on the Ohio Achievement Test with developing characters, setting, and plot. In addition, the audience can make connections among digital storytelling videos and find similarities and differences about the plot. This type of activity allows the students to take ownership of their work and be more inclined to connect with the story, since it is related to their own lives or interests.

Technology is not the only way to promote story development in the classroom. Teachers could participate in shared writing with their students. The Ohio Achievement
Test expects that students are able to identify the differences between genres. The entire class could write poems, folk tales, fairy tales, and fiction stories together as a class. This would help the teacher to clarify any misunderstanding that the students may have in regard to the characteristics of each of these literary texts. The teacher can guide the students in their own thinking, but the students can also take ownership of the material. These writings could be published and placed in the classroom library for students to check out and read during SSR.

**Informational Text**

According to Duke (2000), on average students in American classrooms spend 3.6 minutes per day engaging in reading informational text. One way that teachers can foster higher test scores in the area of informational text on the Ohio Achievement Test is to provide students with more opportunity to read informational texts. Teachers can use nonfiction texts as part of their daily read alouds. Teachers can encourage students to build background knowledge and utilize their schema when reading informational texts. The more connections the reader makes with the passage being read, the more likely that comprehension will occur. Often times the Ohio Achievement Test consists of nonfiction passages that are unfamiliar to the students. This makes it difficult for students to perform well since they lack background knowledge on the topic (Gunning, 2008). Therefore, teachers need to model for students how to use the title to activate background knowledge, as well as use information in the selection to make connections and visualize the information. Teaching students these strategies may help produce better results on the informational text portion of the Ohio Achievement Test. However, struggling students may need individualized instruction in utilizing this skill. Providing small group
instruction may help the students who are currently scoring in the below proficient area on the test.

In addition, teachers should expose students to text features and how they can assist with comprehension of factual information. It may be beneficial for students to create their own informational story and incorporate text features in the report to assist readers in understanding what they have written. This type of writing activity will provide children with the opportunity to see the importance of text features in understanding what is read.

Furthermore, students need to be taught about text structure. Identifying the text structure can help improve students’ comprehension because they are aware of what is expected of them as a reader. Teachers can assist students by teaching them the skills of cause and effect, sequencing, and comparing and contrasting. The students can pretend that they are on a scavenger hunt looking for the text’s structure while reading a passage. The teacher may then model how knowing the text’s structure made it easier to understand what was being read.

*Above, Near, and Below Proficient Students*

It is important to meet the needs of each learner in the classroom. Enriching students, as well as providing intervention is necessary to ensure academic growth among all students. Since there are six third grade classrooms in this particular district, a designated block of time each week could be utilized to separate students into groups according to their needs. Each classroom teacher would be responsible for creating an activity to address a particular skill with the group of students whom he/she will assist in
his/her classroom. This may help address particular skills, as well as provide targeted instruction at the students’ current level of learning.

In addition, enlisting the support of gifted teachers, as well as intervention teachers may be helpful to ensure that all teachers are preparing the students in the same way for the Ohio Achievement Tests. Content terminology, reading skills and strategies that should be used, as well as the types of responses that are acceptable should be discussed to make sure that all students are equally prepared for the tests.

Administrators

Administrators may want to analyze other grade levels’ test scores or look at test scores over a lengthier period of time. Themes or patterns of weakness may occur if a longer period of time is analyzed. Looking at data from other grade levels may show a common area in which an entire elementary building is deficient. This could mean that curriculum alignment may need to be addressed to help close any gaps that may be missing from instruction. Finally, examining data over time may reveal areas of strengths and weaknesses in reading instruction in each classroom setting, suggesting that professional development may be warranted.

Administrators may need to look at hiring intervention teachers to help provide small group instruction to students who are struggling with certain concepts. Finances may pose a problem in the district. Therefore, administrators should explore other options to provide intervention. For instance, looking for retired teachers or community members who would be willing to donate some of their time to help struggling students in the area of reading may be beneficial.
Summary

This chapter summarized the results of the study, as well as provided suggestions to help students become stronger readers. It may be helpful to analyze test scores from previous years not included in the study to gain more insight into patterns of weakness. Based on the results from this study, no definite patterns of weakness exist. However, literary text appears to be an area that should be focused on in the future. Educators will have to utilize the most effective reading strategies in hopes of improving test scores in this particular elementary school.
References


APPENDIX A.

2006 OHIO GRADE 3 READING ACHIEVEMENT TEST RESULTS
### 2006 Ohio Grade 3 Reading Achievement Test Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Above Proficient</th>
<th>Near Proficient</th>
<th>Below Proficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Acquisition of Vocabulary</strong></td>
<td>n = 61 (48%)</td>
<td>n = 42 (33%)</td>
<td>n = 24 (19%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading Process</strong></td>
<td>n = 56 (44%)</td>
<td>n = 34 (27%)</td>
<td>n = 37 (29%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Informational Text</strong></td>
<td>n = 50 (39%)</td>
<td>n = 47 (37%)</td>
<td>n = 30 (24%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Literary Text</strong></td>
<td>n = 35 (28%)</td>
<td>n = 53 (42%)</td>
<td>n = 39 (30%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**n = 127**
APPENDIX B.

2007 OHIO GRADE 3 READING ACHIEVEMENT TEST RESULTS
## 2007 Ohio Grade 3 Reading Achievement Test Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Above Proficient</th>
<th>Near Proficient</th>
<th>Below Proficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acquisition of Vocabulary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n = 120</td>
<td>n = 74 (62%)</td>
<td>n = 41 (34%)</td>
<td>n = 5 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Process</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n = 120</td>
<td>n = 67 (56%)</td>
<td>n = 42 (35%)</td>
<td>n = 11 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informational Text</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n = 120</td>
<td>n = 78 (65%)</td>
<td>n = 35 (29%)</td>
<td>n = 7 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary Text</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n = 120</td>
<td>n = 71 (60%)</td>
<td>n = 41 (34%)</td>
<td>n = 8 (.06%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C.

2008 OHIO GRADE 3 READING ACHIEVEMENT TEST RESULTS
## 2008 Ohio Grade 3 Reading Achievement Test Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Above Proficient</th>
<th>Near Proficient</th>
<th>Below Proficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Acquisition of Vocabulary</strong></td>
<td>n = 76 (60%)</td>
<td>n = 37 (29%)</td>
<td>n = 14 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading Process</strong></td>
<td>n = 78 (61%)</td>
<td>n = 33 (26%)</td>
<td>n = 16 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Informational Text</strong></td>
<td>n = 66 (52%)</td>
<td>n = 43 (34%)</td>
<td>n = 18 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Literary Text</strong></td>
<td>n = 44 (35%)</td>
<td>n = 63 (50%)</td>
<td>n = 20 (16%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX D.

ACQUISITION OF VOCABULARY LINE GRAPH
Number of Students Scoring “Above Proficient,” “Near Proficient,” and “Below Proficient” from 2006-2008
APPENDIX E.

READING PROCESS LINE GRAPH
Number of Students Scoring “Above Proficient,” “Near Proficient,” and “Below Proficient” from 2006-2008
APPENDIX F.

INFORMATIONAL TEXT LINE GRAPH
Number of Students scoring “Above Proficient,” “Near Proficient,” and “Below Proficient” from 2006-2008
APPENDIX G.

LITERARY TEXT LINE GRAPH
Number of Students Scoring “Above Proficient,” “Near Proficient,” and “Below Proficient” from 2006-2008