Effects of Ability Grouping for Literacy Instruction in Kindergarten
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BACKGROUND

• PK-6/ 405 students/ 8 parishes Santa Fe Deanery
• Whole child curriculum
• School goals in reading and math
• Past practices ineffective in preparing students for early reading. Over 1/2 of students entered 1st grade this year without skills necessary for success in reading
• The proportion of children at-risk (in reading) at the end of kindergarten who caught up in first grade without specialized instruction was approximately 1% (O’Connor, 2000)

CURRENT STUDY

When ability grouping is utilized in a flexible and temporary manner, with appropriate curricular adjustment, significant achievement gains can be realized (Tieso, 2003).

Purpose Statement
To determine whether ability grouping across classrooms would improve reading achievement of Kindergarten students.

Research Questions
Does ability grouping across classrooms and grade levels for reading instruction have a positive impact on reading achievement for Kindergarten students?

Hypotheses
Students who are ability grouped for literacy instruction will have greater achievement compared to students who were not grouped

METHOD

Research addressed the problem of low achieving Kindergarten students in the area of literacy. 54 students were assessed using DIBELS and placed into ability groups for instruction 4 days a week. Students were reassessed at the end of Nov. to determine progress. Descriptive statistics, inferential analysis, and trends were used to analyze data.

FINDINGS

Ability grouping for Kindergarten students across classrooms under appropriate conditions was proven to be effective at SNRCS during the time frame of the study. Analysis of baseline and first short cycle assessment data demonstrated noteworthy gains in the areas of initial sound fluency and letter naming fluency (p < .001). The change in proportion of students scoring in the intensive, strategic and benchmark ranges between assessments was significant x² (2, N = 53) = 6.31, p < .05. A comparison of 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 data showed significant achievement of the latter group x² (2, N = 53) = 5.45, p < .10. Teacher feedback was favorable and showed a trend in the belief that ability grouping had a positive impact on student achievement. Student feedback indicated a slight positive change in attitudes about reading and ability.

DISCUSSION AND EXTENSION

• General results indicated that ability grouping had a positive impact on reading success for Kindergarten students.
• Findings will be applied toward continuous improvement efforts and action planning for next year.
• Ability grouping for Kindergarten students in the area of reading will become standard practice.
• The use of DIBELS for assessment, placement and progress monitoring will continue.
• Implications provide hope that all students will read on or above grade level.
• It is hoped that success in reading will cross over into other subject areas and have an impact on overall academic achievement of students.
• Extension and study of the effects of ability grouping for reading at other levels.
• Consideration of ability grouping for math.

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