

Kindergarten Reading Achievement Using

Small Guided Reading Groups

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between small guided reading group instruction and students reading at or above grade level expectations. A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between the extent of small group instruction and whether kindergarten students met end of the year expectations in Language Arts. The study analyzed three years of data. The first year did not use small guided reading groups, the second year had small guided reading groups for half of the year, and the third year had small guided reading groups for the whole year. A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between the extent of small group instruction and whether kindergarten students met or exceeded end of the year reading expectations. The results were significant  $X^2(2, N = 240) = 14.31, p = .001$ , indicating that there was a relationship. A series of post-hoc chi-square tests were performed to compare the relationship between each pairing of conditions to identify the pattern in which the extent of small group instruction was associated with performance. Results were significant for the comparison of no group instruction and half year small group instruction  $X^2(1, N = 155) = 10.55, p = .001$ , with greater than expected meeting or exceeding of expectations for the group that received half year small group instruction. Similarly, results were significant for the comparison of no small group instruction and entire year small group instruction  $X^2(1, N = 166) = 9.26, p = .002$ , with greater than expected meeting or exceeding of expectations for the group that received entire year small group instruction. The differences were not significant in the comparison of entire year small group and half year small group instruction  $X^2(1, N = 159) = .13, p = .723$ .

# **CHAPTER I**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Overview**

This study was conducted to examine the relationship between the use of small guided reading groups and meeting end of the year expectations in kindergarten. The philosophies, purposes, and goals of kindergarten have continued to change with an increase in academic expectations and a decrease in the importance of social behaviors. This shift has become more unified with that of a first-grade curriculum (Colgan, 2016). The academic expectations have increased, but the developmental and maturity window of a 5 and 6-year-old remains the same.

The increase in expectations puts pressure on kindergarten teachers to promote child development and maturation while providing rigorous instruction to meet the end of the year expectations. To do so, the use of small group instruction is beneficial, which allows the teacher to teach a group of students with similar needs (Errthum, 2013; Pyle & Deluca, 2013). This is used instead of whole group instruction, which tends to be taught towards the middle of the line students with the teacher doing their best to make their way around to those who might be struggling.

Programs and ideas for implementation of small group instruction have been developed to allow teachers to spend more time teaching while improving student achievement. Small group instruction is typically run with the class split into smaller groups based on similar needs. These groups will then move through different stations to practice and apply taught literacy skills, one of which is run by the teacher. These stations are in support of Piaget's beliefs of students being motivated to learn through interactive experiences while establishing their independent understanding of skills.

A classroom is full of a wide range of learners at different levels. Knowing the high expectations that are defined for kindergarten, it was a priority of this researcher to find the best way to get the most one-on-one time with students in order to understand and provide what they needed to be successful. Designing a whole group lesson to meet the needs of every student was extremely difficult, especially when striving to meet and exceed the high expectations that are set. After studying programs and observing classrooms that used small groups in reading, this researcher, in her role as a kindergarten teacher, was interested in trying small guided reading groups. Other members of the kindergarten team were also interested in switching to this approach.

Through the efforts of the researcher and other members of the kindergarten team and with the approved support of school administration, Kindergarten Language Arts instruction at the school gradually shifted from whole group to small group instruction. In the 2015-2016 school year, all reading instruction was whole group. In the 2016-2017 school year, the first half of the year reading instruction was whole group, and in the second half of the year, the instruction was small group. In the 2017-2018 school year, all reading instruction was small group. Small group work involved independent application and practice of literacy skills and most importantly, daily, individualized teacher instruction of literacy skills application when reading and comprehending text.

Seeing the progress and success of the students from meeting in small groups daily, this researcher decided to compare the proportions of children meeting end of year reading expectations under entire year whole group instruction, half year whole group/half year small group instruction, and entire year small group instruction.

### **Statement of Problem**

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between the amount of small guided reading group instruction and whether kindergarten students were reading at or above grade level at the end of the school year.

### **Hypothesis**

The null hypothesis was that the extent to which kindergarten students receive small group literacy instruction is independent of whether they were reading at or above grade level at the end of the school year.

### **Operational Definitions**

*Whole group instruction* consisted of a large group of homogenous students who were grouped based on similar abilities from their KLA (Kindergarten Literacy Assessment) card. The teaching of whole group instruction was based on the teacher giving instruction to the general needs of the group followed by an independent activity to practice and apply the skills taught. The teacher circulated the classroom to check in on students amongst the class.

*Small group instruction* included the same homogenous ability-based group of students. However, after the teacher provided the general instruction, the students were broken into smaller more homogenous ability-based groups that rotated through stations where they had the opportunity to apply varying skills and received instruction at a teacher-based station. The independent activities included variations of literacy skills, sight word activities, reading text on their individual level, comprehension practice, writing tasks, and the teacher station. The teacher station was the critical piece of the rotation. This allowed every student to meet with the teacher each day to receive instruction that had a more centralized focus on their needs.



*Grade level performance* was determined via Fountas and Pinnell. Children were identified as reading at or above grade level at the end of the school year if they performed at the D level or higher on Fountas and Pinnell. Fountas and Pinnell provided teachers with the knowledge of a student's independent and instructional reading levels. The teacher was able to observe the students reading behaviors and engaged in comprehension questions that went beyond the basic retelling of the text (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012).

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

It's a new school year and the expectation of each child reading at the end of Kindergarten remains. However, each class ranges from a clear strong knowledge of letters and sounds to not knowing what a letter is let alone that a sound is associated with it. On average, students entering Kindergarten know less than half of the letter names and fewer letter sounds (Piasta & Wagner, 2010). The lack these foundational skills and the rigor of Kindergarten's increased demands in the reading curriculum make building a solid foundation of literacy skills critical. Furthermore, with the implications of our Common Core State Standards, the expectations are that each child learns to read regardless of whether they are developmentally ready (Moran & Senseny, 2016). Becoming developmentally ready takes the student from building their foundational skills to applying these skills to inferring and comprehending independently. Therefore, it is best practice that we differentiate instruction to provide as many opportunities as possible to solidify their foundation and application of those skills through small guided reading group instruction.

#### **Literacy Skills in Kindergarten**

Reading literacy skills are broken into five categories: oral language, reading books, the alphabet, and beginning phonics (Kane, 2014). These skills include, but are not limited to, expressive and receptive language, comprehending directions, describing objects in an environment, print concepts, and letters and their sounds. To monitor the knowledge and growth of these skills, assessments include phonological awareness, syntax, vocabulary, listening comprehension, and decoding-fluency measures (Foorman, Herrera, Petscher, Mitchell, & Truckenmiller, 2015). Establishing a strong foundation of these skills is necessary to carry these

skills into reading to comprehend. Children who can simultaneously consider the letter sound and meaning are better at comprehending throughout their school career (Duke & Block, 2012a).

### **Use of Small Groups for Guided Reading**

Utilizing small group guided reading instruction provides direct instruction to students of similar needs to maximize on time and implementation of instruction (Errthum, 2013). The use of ability based small groups provides experiences that will allow practice of literacy skills that strengthens their foundation and builds independent application. These small groups support development socially, emotionally, and cognitively, while creating opportunities for the children to construct knowledge through a meaningful connection between their prior knowledge and the experience they will gain from working with their peers (Pyle & Deluca, 2013). Providing these learning opportunities allows teachers to gauge the recall and application of the taught strategies. Doing so among a small group allows for closer monitoring daily. Therefore, if it becomes evident that a student is not making the connections to apply the taught strategies, a more intensive instructional regime might be necessary (Otaiba, et al., 2011).

Small groups are teacher-established and guided, whereas a more intensive instructional regime would include a concrete intervention program for the teacher to follow to meet specific needs, like guided reading. In order to establish effective small groups, the remainder of the students must be actively engaged practicing literacy skills independently. Guided reading is used to provide a more individualized literacy instruction among a smaller group of students. The teacher makes groups with tasks that are intentionally differentiated to aid as a means of catching up to peers or enriching already learned skills (Mokhtari, Porter, & Edwards, 2010). A critical component to successful small group work is a clear establishment of routines, expectations, and procedures. In order to establish routines, the teacher will build upon the

activities used as time goes on. Typically, the initial use of these small groups will be simple independent tasks done in short increments of time to build the routines and procedures of what it looks, what it sounds like, and apply rules to eliminate distractions. In addition, once the time is up for that activity, the teacher will establish how the clean-up and rotation should go.

As the stamina of these groups increases, the teacher is creating learning opportunities that appeal to differing learning styles and can combine learning and playing so that students are learning in a fun, interesting, and valuable manner (Banerjee, Alsalman, & Alqafari, 2016). The independent activities can incorporate the application and practice of literacy skills through means of tasks that meet the needs of audio, kinesthetic, and visual learners to ensure motivation and engagement. These tasks keep the students actively engaged to minimize distractions and interruptions from one another and while the teacher is conducting the small guided reading group instruction. Being that the groups are established by the teacher through the determination of each child's needs, the flexible grouping allows the teacher to constantly adjust the groups and tasks utilized. The teacher monitors the growth and needs using observation and anecdotal records from the work in the small group and independent tasks. Monitoring these observations and records allows for the teacher to support instruction with the given tasks to continue to accelerate students literacy progress (Bates, 2013).

### **Purpose of Small Groups**

Through assessments and observations, teachers can establish strengths and areas of weaknesses for their students. By utilizing small groups, teachers can home in on these skills to provide direct instruction that focuses on and strengthens those areas of weakness through application of those skills. Guided reading provides genuine experiences to learn and apply literacy skills needed to improve student reading comprehension (Carrasco, 2016). Pertinent

literacy skills that lead to reading emergent texts include knowledge of letters and sounds, sight words, rhyming, blending, segmenting, discriminating sounds within a word, and comprehending independent reading to infer and respond to comprehension questions. These skills are what each activity is based on. Using direct instruction allows the teacher to closely monitor the growth of these small groups, to alter and guide instruction to allow for continued success with the application of these skills. A common resource used by teachers with small group guided reading instruction are decodable and leveled books. In this small group setting, these books can be chosen to meet the needs of the group and to guide and practice strategies students need to continue to grow. These decodable and leveled reading books lend themselves to establishing strong early literacy development skills (Turner, 2018). While these are not the only resource for small group instruction, being able to provide direct instruction on certain skills within a similar leveled reading group allows for the development and application of the literacy skills needed to read and comprehend simultaneously. Throughout the small group instruction, literacy skills are being taught directly from the teacher or practiced independently within the other tasks established by the teacher. These routines and procedures ensure that even during independent practice, there are opportunities to apply these skills. In creating and establishing these actively engaging tasks, students practice these literacy skills while developing independence and the ability to self-regulate, which was shown to help with inattention and testing scores as they moved through their schooling career (Dennis, 2016).

## **Outcomes**

In the study of literacy skills and small group instruction, impacts were larger in comparison to those receiving whole group instruction (Piasta & Wagner, 2010). Not only will students work directly with the teacher daily, but also gain independent experiences within the other small group activities that promote literacy skills. These small group learning centers have been shown to provide optimum learning opportunities to strengthen oral language, reading comprehension, listening comprehension, and writing (Baker, 2001). Through the repetitive and varying uses of activities to engage learners and meet their needs through a menu of activities, it was proven those receiving this similar type of instruction outperformed those receiving whole group instruction (Simmons, et al, 2015).

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODS**

The purpose of this study was to analyze the effect of small guided reading group instruction as compared to whole group reading instruction. Specifically, the study analyzed whether kindergarten students met end of the year Language Arts reading expectations by reading at or above grade level at the end of the school year.

#### **Design**

The study used a retrospective casual-comparative study to examine whether children meeting end of the year expectations was independent of the extent of small group instruction. The independent variable was the extent to which students received small group instruction (3 levels – none, half-year, whole-year). The dependent variable was whether they were reading at or above grade level at the end of the year as determined by a Fountas and Pinnell performance of Level D or higher. The statistical test used was the chi-square test of independence.

#### **Participants**

Participants in this study were two hundred forty-three 5- and 6-year-old kindergarten students who attended school during the following school years: 2015-2016 (no small group instruction) with 81 students, 2016-2017 (half year small group instruction) with 74 students, and 2017-2018 (entire year small group instruction) with 85. The study was conducted in a school within a suburban area in the mid-Atlantic region. The population of the school in 2015 was 580 students, of which about 74.7% were White, 6.9% were African American, 6.6% were Asian, 6% were Hispanic, and 5.9% were of two or more races. The population of the school in 2016 was 587 students, of which about 71.9% were White, 8.7% were African American, 6.1% were Asian, 7.5% were Hispanic, and 5.8% were of two or more races. The population of the school in

2017 was 585 students, of which about 71.6% were White, 7.9% were African American, 5.5% were Asian, 9.1% were Hispanic, and 6% were of two or more races.

### **Instrument**

All kindergarten students' academic data for reading was collected using Fountas and Pinnell to determine their independent and instructional reading levels. Fountas and Pinnell is a standardized test that is administered by the teacher one-on-one with a student. The test measures decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension skills. This assessment allows teachers to engage one-on-one with students to have conversations about independently read text, which gives insight on comprehension skills (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). These conversations are based off text that is read aloud independently by the student while the teacher scores for accuracy. Upon completing the reading, the teacher guides the conversation by asking open-ended explicit and inferential comprehension questions to check to for understanding of the text. The Fountas and Pinnell assessment has been proven to be reliable and valid (Clay, Fountas, et al., 2019). Individual student data was collected in their Fountas and Pinnell folder and then compiled as a grade level to be shared with the reading specialist.

### **Procedure**

Reading instruction was conducted among four kindergarten classrooms for an hour and a half block for each year. The teachers remained the same for all years of the study. Each classroom typically had between 18-25 students. Students were initially placed in their kindergarten classrooms by the principal; placement was random. Consequently, classrooms were relatively heterogeneous. Once the necessary literacy information was collected using the KLA (kindergarten literacy assessment), reading classrooms were created based on ability needs, making the classes more homogeneous for the reading block. These classroom placements are



created to be flexible so that when the quarterly data is collected, students can move to the reading class that best fits their needs. The move to another classroom was warranted from the determination of their Fountas and Pinnell reading level. Similar Fountas and Pinnell reading levels are placed in the same classroom. The KLA card is also analyzed when making moves to another classroom. The moves to another classroom were typically only done to start the third quarter. The intention was to keep the number of students within a classroom relatively similar; however, the two classrooms that needed the most support were typically kept at smaller numbers. The classroom needing the most support worked with the reading specialist or a paraprofessional daily. Since the class with the lowest achieving students had daily reading specialist or paraprofessional support, the classroom with the next to the lowest achieving students had the least number of students. In addition, students receiving education services or in a classroom with many English Language Learners were supported by a paraprofessional for a block of time, regardless of their reading block classroom placement. The above process was the same for each year of the study.

In each school year of the study, all kindergarten students were evaluated for their progress in early literacy and reading skills on a quarterly basis. The initial measurement tool was the Kindergarten Literacy Assessment. This initial assessment was conducted by homeroom teachers of the randomly assigned, heterogeneously grouped classrooms. This assessment evaluates uppercase letter identification, lowercase letter identification, letter sound production, sight word knowledge, rhyming, segmenting, blending, identification of beginning, middle, and ending letter sounds, decodable words, listening comprehension, and the identification of the main idea of a text as well as two details to support. Those students who met the branching rules of identifying 85% of all letters (44/52), 85% of letter sounds (22/26), and identifying 13 or more

sight words were then assessed using Fountas and Pinnell. The assessment was done quarterly; however, after the initial assessment by the homeroom teacher, subsequent assessments were completed by the teacher providing reading instruction. The results of the quarterly assessments were used for providing feedback to parents on the report cards. In the years in which there was a reading specialist, the reading specialist received copies of the scores so that she could also monitor student progress. The results were also used to guide teacher instruction. Assessment data was maintained securely.

The county outlines its expectations for kindergarten through the report card. The report card is based off kindergarten standards and broken down by not evident (NE), developing (DV), and consistently evident (CE) which is defined with percentages that align with the KLA card. The breakdown for reading levels is: NE (unable to read emergent-reader text, concepts of print), DV (reads emergent-reader text with limited purpose and/or understanding, levels A-C), and CE (reads grade level or emergent reader text with purpose and understanding, Level D). The levels are determined by the Fountas and Pinnell assessment.

At the end of the school year, children were considered to be reading at grade level if they were reading at Level D on Fountas and Pinnell. “Level D” texts are familiar or easy content with simple factual texts, animal fantasy, and realistic fiction. Within these texts some characteristics include, but are not limited to, simple dialogue, sentences of varying lengths with prepositional phrases and adjectives, sentences that turn over to the next page, word with -s and -ing endings, and fewer repetitive language patterns. Students at this level typically track print with their eyes rather than fingers, can read text with fewer repeating language patterns and a range of punctuation and dialogue, and consistently monitor print and information to make self-corrections.

In the 2015-2106 school year, reading instruction was whole group by classroom, with the classes relatively homogenously grouped. There is no set reading curriculum within the county, leaving the teachers to use their discretion, standards, and report card to guide how and what to teach. Skills addressed included listening comprehension, discussing stories, phonemic awareness, letter and word identification. In that school year, there was no reading specialist and no specialized intervention programs.

In the 2016-2017 school year, students in the lowest level classroom received assistance from a reading specialist and also had access to specialized intervention programs. The first and second quarter reading instruction was through whole group-based instruction for all four classes. The reading instruction was taught to the whole group to meet the general needs of the class for comprehension, word work, and sight word activities. The lowest level class that participated in interventions had support from the reading specialist. The class that was a step above the intervention class that had more academic needs than the two other classes (i.e., the second lowest achieving group) had support for a 45-minute block from the instructional helper. The reading specialist compiled the data for each quarter to monitor growth and share with the administration.

The small guided reading group instruction started in the third quarter for all four classes in the 2016-2017 school year. The results of the KLA and Fountas and Pinnell were used to determine groupings within each classroom. Each classroom consisted of approximately 18-25 students and was further broken down into four groups of 4-6 students to increase homogeneity to allow small group instruction closely aligned to ability.

Once the classes were broken into smaller groups, there was a portion of the hour and a half language arts block in which the class participated in a whole group listening comprehension

lesson. Students listened to a story and responded to the story through conversations and independently on a recording response activity. The recording responses varied from story maps, sequencing, retelling through beginning, middle and end, main idea and details, and comparing and contrasting. The remainder of the time was when small group work was conducted. This block contained word work, sight words, writing, and independent reading of leveled decodable books. When the small groups rotation started, a group of students worked with the teacher, while the other three groups worked independently. The independent activities included practice in word work, sight words, writing, and independent reading to practice fluency and comprehension skills. The rotations were done in an eight to ten-minute increment, with each student completing a full rotation of each station. This allowed for each student to work closely with the teacher daily.

Based on the data that was collected from the KLA card, Fountas and Pinnell, and teacher's observation, interventions were used when deemed appropriate for students. Once the groups were established, the group of students that needed the most support with meeting grade level expectations used the Foundations intervention program to guide their instruction (Foundations Listen, 2017). Using the student data from the classroom that needed the most support, around twelve students received this intervention. The reading specialist and the reading paraprofessional provided the instruction each day for a 30-minute time frame. Students receive assessments throughout the intervention with the potential of switching to a different intervention or testing out. In this situation, other students were placed in that students place if needed. Students were placed in intervention programs that best fit their needs. Other interventions were, SIPPS (systematic instruction in phone awareness), and LLI (leveled literacy intervention) which is derived from Fountas and Pinnell (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). Each year the method of

grouping the students (i.e., KLA, Fountas and Pinnell, teacher observations) remained consistent. The small group placement was flexible; therefore, moves were made as necessary.

In the 2017-2018 school year, there was small group instruction throughout the year. The small group instructional activities were the same, yet more established since each teacher had more experience in conducting small group instruction. The groups were established based off the KLA (kindergarten literacy assessment) card that was conducted within the first few weeks of school. Students who met the branching rules from the KLA card were also administered the Fountas and Pinnell assessment. Within each classroom, the groups were homogenous ability-based groups and were subject to change with progress and within the reassessments that were done quarterly. At the end of quarter 2, all students receive the Fountas and Pinnell assessment in addition to the KLA. At this time the groups were able to be refined since more data was collected from the growth that each student made. This ensured students were still working amongst similar students of academic strengths and weaknesses. Throughout the remainder of each year, students had the opportunity to move groups as necessary based on ability.

A chi-square test of independence was used to determine if the extent of small group reading instruction was independent of whether kindergarten students were reading at or above grade level at the end of the year.

## **Chapter IV**

### **RESULTS**

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between the amount of small guided reading group instruction and whether kindergarten students were reading at or above grade level at the end of the school year.

The study was conducted by analyzing three years of data. The first year did not use small guided reading groups, the second year had small guided reading groups for half of the year, and the third year had small guided reading groups for the whole year.

The null hypothesis was that the extent to which kindergarten students receive small group literacy instruction is independent of whether they were reading at or above grade level at the end of the school year. The hypothesis was rejected in conclusion with the study's results.

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between the extent of small group instruction and whether kindergarten students met end of the year expectations in Language Arts. The results were significant  $X^2 (2, N = 240) = 14.31, p = .001$ , indicating that there was a relationship. Please See Table 1 for observed and expected frequencies of students meeting expectations.

Table 1.

*Frequencies of Grade Level Reading Accomplishments by Extent of Small Group Instruction and Chi-Square Results*

Outcome	No Small Group Instruction		Half Year Small Group Instruction		Entire Year Small Group Instruction		X <sup>2</sup>
	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency	
At or Above Grade Level	46	58.4	60	53.3	67	61.3	14.31*
Below Grade Level	35	22.6	14	20.7	18	23.7	

\*Significant at  $p \leq .001$

A series of post-hoc chi-square tests were performed to compare the relationship between each pairing of conditions to identify the pattern in which the extent of small group instruction was associated with performance. Results were significant for the comparison of no small group instruction and half year small group instruction  $X^2 (1, N = 155) = 10.55, p = .001$ . The group that received a full year of small guided reading group instruction achieved higher reading level scores than previous years without small guided reading groups. Please see Table 2 for observed and expected frequencies of students meeting expectations.

Table 2.

*Frequencies of Grade Level Reading Accomplishments for No Small Group and Half Year Small Group Instruction*

	No Small Group Instruction		Half Year Small Group Instruction		$X^2$
Outcome	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency	
At or Above Grade Level	46	55.4	60	50.6	10.55*
Below Grade Level	35	25.6	14	23.4	

\*Significant at  $p \leq .001$

Similarly, results were significant for the comparison of no small group instruction and entire year small group instruction  $X^2 (1, N = 166) = 9.26, p = .002$ . The differences were not significant in the comparison of entire year small group and half year small group instruction  $X^2 (1, N = 159) = .13, p = .723$ . Please see Tables 3 and 4 for observed and expected frequencies of students meeting expectations.



Table 3.

*Frequency of Grade Level Reading Accomplishments for No Small Group and Entire Year Small Group Instruction*

	No Small Group Instruction		Entire Year Small Group Instruction		X <sup>2</sup>
Outcome	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency	
At or Above Grade Level	46	55.1	67	57.9	9.26*
Below Grade Level	35	25.9	18	27.1	

\*Significant at  $p \leq .01$

Table 4.

*Frequencies of Grade Level Reading Accomplishments for Entire Year Small Group and Half Year Small Group Instruction*

	Entire Year Small Group Instruction		Half Year Small Group Instruction		X <sup>2</sup>
Outcome	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency	
At or Above Grade Level	67	67.9	60	59.1	.13(NS)
Below Grade Level	18	17.1	14	14.9	

NS = non-significant at  $p \leq .05$

## **Chapter V**

### **DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between the amount of small guided reading group instruction and whether kindergarten students were reading at or above grade level at the end of the school year.

The study was conducted by analyzing three years of data. The first year did not use small guided reading groups, the second year had small guided reading groups for the second half of the year, and the third year had small guided reading groups for the whole year.

The null hypothesis was that the extent to which kindergarten students receive small group literacy instruction is independent of whether they were reading at or above grade level at the end of the school year. The results of a chi-square test of independence were significant, indicating that there was a relationship; consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected. A series of post-hoc chi-square tests indicated that full year small group instruction was associated with more people meeting or exceeding expectations than was no small group instruction, and half year small group instruction was associated with more people meeting or exceeding expectations than was no small group instruction. There was not a difference in students meeting expectations between whole year and half year small group instruction.

#### **Implications of Results**

Results from the study support the theory that small guided reading group instruction is effective in helping students to read at or above grade level expectations. Conducting small guided reading groups aids in providing students with opportunities to be exposed to and apply literacy skills that are being taught. This allows the teacher to work closely with students on skills that build their foundation and apply strategies while reading text independently. Doing so

then allows the teacher to engage in conversations about the text while supporting their individual needs.

Mid-year grouping was more precise in placing students of comparable ability together so that instruction was more targeted to ability level. Additionally, skills taught at the beginning of the year focus on solidifying foundational skills, so while not as necessary for differentiated groups, the small groups were still utilized for routine and behavior management purposes. Once the students are regrouped at the midyear point with more conclusive data and exposure to literacy skills, the groups are more homogeneous in ability. The data that allows for finer tuned ability-based groups is not available at the beginning of the year as requirements need to be met before further assessments can be done. However, with the focus on foundational skills at the beginning of the year shifting to higher level reading skills in the second half of the year, the fine-tuned small group instruction is particularly important in the latter part of the year.

Based on researcher observations, when working in small groups, students had more motivation to work because of the hands-on activities that were implemented for the rotations. The students had opportunities for movement, working with partners, and literacy games. The activities were engaging and allowed for the students to work independently and at a noise level that did not act as a distraction to the others working. Overall, the use of the small groups is engaging, motivating, and beneficial in students learning. These observations, in conjunction with the findings that part or whole year small group instruction is associated with more students reading at or above grade level, strongly support using small group instruction in Kindergarten.

### **Threats to The Validity**

One threat to the external validity was that some of the students had limited knowledge of the English language. This threatens the validity as the assessment requires students to read and

comprehend independently a variety of fiction and non-fiction texts. Limited knowledge of the English language tends to interfere heavily with comprehension as that is the way the student is understanding what is read in their second language. The effects of small group instruction may differ based on the English proficiency of the students.

Internal validity issues include that there were days that small guided reading groups did not meet or did not complete a full rotation within the reading block. These issues occurred when changes were made to the school schedule for events or reteaching moments necessary to building upon prior knowledge. Thus, the small group intervention was not always consistent.

Another internal threat is the administration of the assessment. Due to limited time for completing the reading assessment, the kindergarten team along with the reading specialist worked together to complete each student's assessment. Therefore, students may not be reading with their assigned reading teacher with whom the student is most comfortable. This can interfere with the student's comfort level in responding to the conversational piece of the comprehension questions of the assessment. Consequently, the students' performance on testing may not always reflect their language arts skills.

### **Connections to Existing Literature**

Current results are consistent with other studies in providing evidence that small guided groups are beneficial to the success rates of students. In a study conducted by Errthum (2013), the teachers stated that they met all expectations for students when using small groups. Daily small group time allowed the teacher to hold the students accountable for their learning by gauging their progress together. This allowed the teacher and students to identify strengths and weaknesses to focus on daily.

In addition, a study conducted by Pyle & Deluca (2013), delves into the high expectations set on kindergarten students and how teachers worked towards helping each student to be successful. Their accountability approach with small guided reading groups held the teachers accountable for teaching to the students' need and the rigor of the curriculum. In doing so, it bridged the need of supporting individual student learning and meeting the high expectation of curriculum demands.

Both the Errthum (2013) and Pyle & Deluca (2013) studies, along with many more in the literature, are consistent with the present findings in supporting the use of small guided groups. This approach ensures meeting the needs of all students while holding the students and teachers accountable for monitoring and meeting the expectations set through the curriculum.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Future studies should examine whether the effects of small group Kindergarten instruction persist when students are tested at the beginning of first grade. Being out of school during summer leaves a window for a natural regression rate for all students as the exposure to rigorous instruction is limited.

In addition, a study can examine the impact of small group instruction in first grade. This type of study could potentially provide further evidence of the significance of small group reading instruction, especially for those students who did not meet end of the year kindergarten expectations or had a significant regression over the summer.

### **Conclusions**

This study provides evidence that small guided reading group instruction played a significant role in increasing the student success rate in meeting or exceeding grade level reading expectations. Within the findings of the study, whole year and half year produced higher success

rates in meeting grade level expectations compared to no small group instruction. However, there was not a difference between half year and whole year. Observational data suggested that small group instruction was associated with greater student engagement and motivation.

Consequently, the results of this study support using small group instruction for Kindergarten students. It is recommended that future research examine whether the positive effects of small group instruction persist over the summer and whether small group instruction is valuable in first grade. This will give a continued understanding of the impact that small guided reading group instruction has on a student's success rates in reading.

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