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ABSTRACT

Students in the targeted school exhibited a decline in reading scores between second and fourth grade. Due to poor reading levels for 2 consecutive years the state put the school on a probationary list with in its district. Evidence for the existence of the problem included documented low reading test scores, below proficiency assessment records, and poor performance on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS). The district assigned the school to a reading grant for a 3-year period. During this 3-year period teachers received staff development training to improve reading strategies taught in the classroom and create consistency across grade levels. The grant also introduced better assessment data gathering tools and methods. Reading, writing, using rubrics was also part of staff development. Probable causes for below proficiency reading scores and assessment were teaching strategies and the stories being read were more complex at the third and fourth grade level. Data were collected and assessed by "unfamiliar methods." There was not a strong vein of grade level to grade level reading strategies for proficient success. Students received 70 minutes of visual art instruction from an art specialist for 18 weeks of a 36 week year. After identifying the three reading areas to improve upon, oral fluency, written accuracy, and reading comprehension, the interventions chosen to be incorporated during visual art class were: higher order thinking skills, vocabulary word wall, draw and tell strategy, read-a-loud strategy, think-a-loud strategy, and illustrating books, stories, and posters. In the regular education classroom it was decided to add an art content station to the 2-hour reading block. Post-intervention data indicated an improvement in oral fluency, written accuracy, and reading comprehension within the experimental group compared to the pre-test assessments and the control groups post data results. The behavior and social skills of the students also improved based on anecdotal records and observational checklists. (Contains 31 references and 10 tables of data.) (Author/RS)

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IMPROVING ORAL FLUENCY, WRITTEN ACCURACY, AND READING COMPREHENSION IN THE 3RD GRADE USING VISUAL ART CONTENT

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Brian K. Nickell

An Action Research Project submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the

School of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of Masters of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

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Field-Based Master's Program

Chicago, Illinois

May 2003

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Author: Brian Nickell

Date: May 2003

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Probable causes for below proficiency reading scores and assessment were teaching strategies and the stories being read were more complex at the third and fourth grade level. Data was collected and assessed by unfamiliar methods. There was not a strong vein of grade level to grade level reading strategies for proficient success. Students received 70 minutes of visual art instruction from an art specialist for 18 weeks of a 36 week year.

After identifying the three reading areas to improve upon, oral fluency, written accuracy, and reading comprehension, the interventions chosen to be incorporated during visual art class were: higher order thinking skills, vocabulary word wall, draw and tell strategy, read-a-loud strategy, think-a-loud strategy, and illustrating books, stories, and posters. In the regular education classroom it was decided to add an art content station to the two hour reading block.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

The students in the targeted third grade class in a Midwestern community exhibited a decline in literacy scores along with the decline of their exposure time spent in visual art class through out the year. Evidence for the existence of the problem included anecdotal records that documented low test scores in reading and poor performance on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) in the reading, writing, and visual arts areas. Assessment records that indicated the level of student academic performance in literacy achievement were also used.

Immediate Problem Context

The school identified is a very old, large building. Built in 1939, it contained everything a school should and more. It had five levels, a basement which housed the cafeteria, two classrooms used for a head start program, a large maintenance area for storing cleaning supply stock along with the custodian office and break room, three counseling rooms, and a band room. The first floor housed three kindergarten classrooms, three first-grade classrooms, three second-grade classrooms, a behavior disorder classroom, a remedial math and reading classroom, the main office, a nurse's office, a parent community room, a wood floor gymnasium, a teacher's lounge, a four hundred seat auditorium with stage, and two offices which housed two kindergarten through second grade reading specialists.

The second floor had three third grade rooms, three fourth grade rooms, and three fifth grade rooms. There was also a library, a computer lab, a conflict intervention room, two special education rooms, and three offices for three reading specialists who serviced third, fourth, and fifth grade students.

The third level consisted of three large rooms, a music room, a science room, and an art room. Each room had ample storage. Water was available in the art room, the science room, and the kindergarten rooms for teacher and student use. Restroom facilities included a boy's restroom and a girl's restroom per grade level, as well as two adult facilities per floor.

The total student population consisted of 330 students. One hundred seventy- five of those students were minorities. Approximately 84% of the students were eligible for free or reduced priced lunch. Thirty- four percent of the population moved in and out of the school annually. There were 32 students identified in special education. The total number of staff was 51. There was a principal, 18 classroom teachers, a music teacher, a physical education, and an art teacher. There were two reading specialists and three reading/math support Title 1 teachers. There was a secretary, a nurse, and a computer support teacher. There were five special education positions, which included a behavioral disorder teacher, a conflict interventionist, and a pre-kindergarten teacher. There was a librarian, 10 para educators, 3 custodians, and 3 food service staff.

Forty-two of the staff members had a bachelor's degree. Six staff members had a bachelor's plus 18 graduate hours, 11 staff members had a master's degree, and 4 staff members had a master's plus hours toward a higher degree.

The district had created benchmarks and rubrics for better assessment and

tracking capability of student achievement. In the targeted school, kindergarten to second grade, students showed a high level of achievement on the district assessment and demonstrated success in reading and writing. At the third and fourth grade levels, there was a downward trend on district assessments and standardized tests. Vocabulary development, comprehension, and reading strategies were skills not fully mastered for these assessments. The school was actively engaged in staff development, with an emphasis on developing reading strategies.

Peer coaching was introduced and implemented, included common plan time, which allowed teachers to collaborate, communicate, and capitalize on each other's strengths. A balanced reading program was fully implemented. Common Student Improvement Plan (CSIP) established criteria for academic achievement at all grade levels.

There were several after school programs available to help those students who needed to achieve greater success. Stepping-Stones and local university sponsored reading clinics were also available to students after school. An increase in parent involvement had been established through weekly newsletters and after school activities for parents and students. Groups were kept at a maximum of five students per group to reduce possible behavioral problems. There weren't any behavior problems documented during any after school program for the year.

The Surrounding Community

The community in which the targeted school was located had a population of approximately 98,000 people, 89% were White and 11% were minority. The median average household income was $ 26,000. The community's percentages in population age

were people over the age of 75 represented 5.5% of the population. People between the ages of 75-55 represented 15% of the population. People between the ages of 55-35 represented 23% of the population. People between the ages of 35-19 represented 30% of the population. School age children ranged between the ages of 17-5 and represented 19% of the population.

The community in which the targeted school was located was part of a metropolitan region in a bi-state setting with a cumulative population of over 350,000 people. The area's households numbered approximately 140,000 homes.

The metropolitan region provided culturally rich facilities ranging from concert halls, convention centers, history and art museums, theatres, festivals, civic centers, conservatories, and a botanical center. The metropolitan area also had a professional orchestra, a youth orchestra, a symphony band, and a performing arts guild. There was a professional hockey team, a professional arena football team, and a professional baseball team.

Leading sources of employment were an aluminum plant, a world competitive farm machinery manufacturer, U.S government military facility manufacturing ammunition, weapons, and military field vehicles, an aircraft cooperation, major medical centers, and major steel manufacturing. Other sources of employment were energy companies, computer software, hardware, and hard wire companies. Retail consumer outlet centers, two shopping malls, food service and beverage distributors, major food processing and packaging industries, and many automobile distribution lots complimented the employment opportunities. The unemployment rate averaged 4.5% for the entire metropolitan area.

The transportation system included a full- service international airport with major airfreight and air passenger carriers. There were several municipal airports and major rail transportation for both freight and private passenger use. A bus system for city travel as well as a bus terminal for cross-country travel was available.

The district had 34 schools. There were 22 elementary schools, 6 intermediate schools, 3 high schools, and 3 alternative education programs. As of 2001 there were over 1,300 teachers, 404 para educators, and 83 administrators. There were 158 custodians and food service personnel, 120 clerical persons, and 39 maintenance personnel, which totaled over 2,100 employees for the district. The benefit for students was for every 19 teachers there was an administrator, for every 3 teachers there was a para educator, and for every 12 students there was one teacher.

The curriculum of this district met and, in most cases, exceeded the state's standard requirements. The state in which the district was located was known for its quality in education. The elementary schools were kindergarten through fifth grade. Academic and special areas taught included: fine arts, health and safety, language arts, mathematics, physical education, reading, science, and social studies. Special features of the K-5 program of this district included: pre school experience for handicapped and at-risk students, emphasized on mathematics, reading, and writing across the curriculum, visiting artists programs, vocal music performance opportunities, supplemental enrichment programs in kindergarten through third grade, special education programs, talented and gifted programs, instrumental music programs beginning in fourth grade, departmental instruction for fourth and fifth graders in art, mathematics, music, physical education, science, and social studies. Grades sixth through twelfth paralleled the K-5

programs in curriculums and assessments at a more advanced level of education. Students were also given opportunities to experience elective courses of interest and classes with advanced placement.

The district received financial grants from a riverboat casino development group and a county regional authority group. The district received over $ 400,000 from the year 2000- 2001 from both agencies combined.

The state offered four major awards in education. They were: The Fine Award (First in Education), Hug Award (Helping Us Grow), Star Award (Stellar Team Achievement Recognition), and visited by the president of The United States of America award (The Presidential Visit). The recipients of these awards were the district, schools, staff, staff programs, and business partners. Fourteen schools in the district had received the Fine Award since its creation in the late 1980s to the present. One of the district's alternative education programs was the first in the state to receive this award twice. Between the years of 1993 and 2001, 669 employees received the HUG award, an award given to outstanding individuals who went above and beyond the call of duty. The individuals are nominated without their knowledge and presented the award during a surprise ceremony. In 1994 this award was honored by the state and given the Golden Achievement Award for effective program planning and implementation from the National School Public Relations Association. A combination of 62 schools and business community partnerships has received the STAR Award, an award honoring the partnerships of schools and business' to better educate and facilitate the needs for special students. In May of 2000, the district was honored by a visit from the President of the United States at one of the high schools.

The district's enrollment saw a steady decline starting in the year 1992. The total district's staff increased until 1998. After 1998, the district reduced classroom teaching positions in reaction to the continued decrease in enrollment. The district prided itself in living up to one of its mission statements "Smaller class sizes better educate children." This mission statement was in jeopardy, the district added two or more students to each class at each grade level to offset a decrease in tax revenues filtered down by the state.

Open enrollment was another area of concern. The school year of 1998-99 a total of 290 students left the district to attend neighboring schools, while only 90 students from other districts had enrolled in to this district. This cost the district between $800,000 and $1,000,000 for the year.

Within a 50 mile radius of the targeted school district there were several post-secondary school opportunities. There were three universities and five colleges, which offered four year degrees, master's degrees, and doctorates. There was a college of chiropractic, and a technical school, which offered two year degrees in computer programming, software design, electronics, business, and professional careers. There were 11 community colleges offering associate's degrees in professional careers, physical therapy, nursing, technology, acupuncture, hairstyling, engineering, and health related degrees. In the community there was a main city library. The main library had an extension library within one of the alternative education facilities. The main library also had a mobile unit, which had three or more stops per day around major outlets of the city as well as at school parking lots after normal school hours. The library also had drop boxes for books located at the local, major grocery chains and retail stores for the convenience of its readers. The main library was also connected to post-secondary

schools and neighboring communities as far as 200 miles away, sharing information and reading materials. The main library offered programs and reading opportunities for all residents young and old. It offered daily story times for the pre-kindergarten children accompanied by adults and weekend activities from storytellers to reading award ceremonies for all age groups.

The community had many recreational opportunities for its residents, which attracted touring visitors. One major river made up the nucleus of this community. Besides supporting natural power and historical landmarks, this river also offered sportsmen hunting and fishing, and provided boating, water skiing, and dockside gambling opportunities.

The community had several public parks, a water park, public swimming pools, tennis courts, public and private golf courses, a county park for camping and nature studies, membership required athletic clubs, two YMCAs, two ponds which froze in the winter months for outdoor skating, and two indoor roller skating parks. There was also an indoor ice arena with two rinks that offered public skating, hockey, figure skating, broomball, and sled hockey for handicapped individuals. All programs were for youth and adult participants. The ice rink also had a program for low-income families and offered programs for the surrounding school districts.

Some of the issues and controversies in this community revolved around the decision making for the community and making more effective decisions for the success of the students. In 1999 the district adopted a new vision and mission statement. The vision was for the community school district to be recognized as the district of choice. The mission statement was for the community school district to enhance each

student's abilities by providing a quality education enriched by its diverse community. Strategic plans were put into place to accomplish both the vision and mission statements. Strategies included implementation of a marketing plan reflecting the districts vision and mission statements; a collaborative plan to create effective measures for staff and student performances and accountable. This included more assessments and documentation to track success and needs of the students. District goals were reevaluated and changed to enhance communication between home and school, and the board of education. Information about student progress was provided to the superintendent of schools regularly by each school in the district so he was well informed of the district's student strengths, accomplishments, and weaknesses.

National Context of the Problem

The problem of reducing student art contact time or reducing art-teaching positions has become a national concern. In the last 10 years many schools across the country offered little or no instruction in the visual arts. The National PTA (2002) researched school districts across the country and looked at how much money they would save by cutting fine arts programs. Schools in Santa Barbara estimated a savings of $320,000 for the year 2002 if art were cut from the district's budget (Rich, 2001). School districts around the country had to make budget cuts in educational spending. A National Conference of State Legislatures fiscal year 2001 report projected a 3.7 % increase in spending for the fiscal year of 2002 for educational programs. This caused some school systems to cut back on art and music programs (Sandham, 2001). Parents of children, who attend Patricia A. Bendorf Elementary school of Clark County Nevada, feel art is very important. They appreciate and understand the significance of these childhood

products and consider them priceless. The superintendent of Clark County was quoted, he viewed art and music as eminent and valuable to learning, but if other cuts didn't balance the budget, these two programs will have to be looked at very carefully. Similar budget situations were faced by schools in Arizona and California, art and music programs were cut in those states (Hogan, 2001).

Mitchell (1996) wrote that as visual arts programs were cut there were noticeable declines in literacy scores and reading achievement. According to Taylor (1993) when the intimate connections between experience and learning are broken, problem solving abilities are reduced or are not applied. Visual art is an experience. Higher order thinking skills are developed as a result of visual art being taught and learned. As stated by Dahl and Freppon (1995) when students visualize their own experiences as factual knowledge and use reading and writing for their own gains, the journey into literate behaviors is well under way. What has been shown to be very beneficial for low income and minority groups of students is the whole language approach. It provides a bridge to instruction and writing in the content areas. The teacher models individual, peer, and whole group instruction and chooses good literature in the form of storybooks to share aloud.

As stated by Eisner (1992) an individual cannot know through language what they cannot imagine. When a student creates the image, whether it is visual, tactile, or auditory, and the image plays a vital role in the student's construction of the meaning through text. A student who has not been encouraged to imagine has a much more difficult time learning how to read. Art is essential to learning. It not only gives students an avenue of self-expression, but also allows students to learn about history and culture. Critical thinking and problem solving skills are also developed through visual art.

Students who can understand and produce art can learn how to work cooperatively in groups and understand how hard work can achieves goals. These goals may directly be related to literacy scores and reading achievements. Children who lack the necessary abilities to read and write need every avenue available to attain the basic standard goals of literacy established by each individual state. Calhoun (1999) concluded that visual art helps children build rich mental models which improves their ability to learn to read and write. Their vocabulary is strengthened and increased, and from the ability to read improves the student's confidence and self esteem.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

Reading is a basic skill that is very important to a child's success in school. The second grade students from the targeted school, who achieved better than the district proficiency standard goal of 90% in oral fluency and written accuracy, were found to be below district standards by fourth grade. In the targeted school kindergarten, first, and second grade students were assessed at 95% and 98% proficient. At the end of their third grade year the same students were not meeting district standards.

The three assessments used to show student-reading achievements were: Retelling assessment test, Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS). For an in depth individual assessment of oral fluency and written accuracy the Retelling assessment was used in the targeted school. The Retelling assessment has a built in diagnostic tool to help teachers evaluate the nature of students reading and writing abilities. The student reads a 120 word passage to a trained technician of the test. The reading is processed and assessed using a grading rubric. Scores of 10 Exceed proficiency, scores of 8-9 Meets proficiency, and scores of 7 or below do not meet proficiency and are put into a Needs category. The targeted school had second grade students' spring scores as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Rubric Scores and Number of Students in Each Category For Retelling Assessment of Reading Oral Fluency and Written Accuracy of Second and Third Grade Students in 2002

	7 and Below (Needs)	8-9 (Meets)	10 (Exceeds)
2nd Grade Scores Spring 2002	0	32	12
3rd Grade Scores Fall 2002	22	15	5

Table 1 shows second grade students promoted to third grade were in the Meets or Exceeds category by district grade level proficiency standards in oral fluency and written accuracy of a second year nine month (2.9) grade level reading standard. By fall of 2002 those students were not meeting third grade oral fluency or written accuracy grade level standards.

The DRA is a one to one assessment. This assessment gives the teacher a chance to observe and interact with the student. The student's responses and behaviors are recorded as he reads the text passage. A conference with the student follows the test where information is shared with the student and assessments are made to determine a reader's independent reading comprehension level, group students effectively for reading experiences, and identify students reading below proficient levels. The DRA's assessment use begins in third grade.

The DRA places the student on a specific level of 3.1 or below. As the year progresses so do the comprehension level expectations of 3.7 by semester and 3.9- 4.1 by promotion into the fourth grade. The target school had fall third grade scores as shown in table 2.

Table 2

Third Grade DRA Reading Comprehension Reading Levels Fall 2002

Below 3.1	At 3.1	Above 3.1
24	13	5

Table 2 shows 24 students below a reading comprehension grade level of 3.1. The district reading proficiency level is 3.1 for students beginning third grade.

The ITBS is a battery of tests to measure a student's learned knowledge and skills from his academic experiences. Reading scores are provided for listening, word analysis, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. Language is tested based on spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and word usage. Writing and listening supplements are used for the test. Third, fourth, and fifth grade students take the ITBS in the fall. The scores are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Third Grade ITBS Reading Comprehension Assessment Data from the 2001-2002 School Year

Performance Percentages	56.4 %	Below 56.4%
Number of Students (55)	31	24

The lowest proficiency level based on district standards is 70%. The targeted schools highest proficiency score was 56.4%.

After examining the presented data students were entering third grade proficient in reading based on scores and assessments. By the end of the first month, third grade students were not meeting third grade proficient standards based on district grade level standard scores and assessments. After receiving the results from The ITBS battery test all of the students tested were 14% from the lowest acceptable performance percentage level.

Probable Causes

There were several probable causes of deficient scores by the targeted third grade. Student mobility was one factor involved in low scores. Lower income families and a large population of minorities were possible indicators. Before 1998, the third grade reading selections and assessment were more difficult. The reading strategies were also more complex and not taught consistently grade level to grade level. Reading groups moved only as fast as the lowest reader in the class. Also, in 1998 the targeted school had a full time visual art instructor with formal art instruction included year round for

students' kindergarten through fifth. Before the beginning of the year 1999, the visual art position had been cut to half time for the year. Students were receiving 70 minutes of art per week for 18 weeks of a 36 week year.

As data were collected, looked over, and compared to previous years, it was apparent that as a child became older and reached higher levels of education, his achievements in reading dropped below district proficiency standards. Moates (2001) stated the success gained in reading education in the lower elementary grades is not being carried over into the upper elementary grades. This has caused heated debates and the need to change entire strategies used. Improving reading scores became a focus of the school. It was evident that performance goals differed from grade level to grade level. Willis (1997) reported the clarity of definitions and purposes of literacy performances of school children is necessary for improvement.

Overcoming the idea of developing authentic learners and assessing these students with authentic devices does not blend with filling in bubble sheets and taking battery tests for assessments to report reading scores. There is a national concern that some results based on ITBS scores are not valid because the low performing schools are reporting more frequency in test preparation than those higher performing schools. Klein, Hamilton, McCaffery, and Stecher (2002) reported this could lead to an inaccurate reading of the gap between minority and majority students being achieved when in actuality the data are skewed because of the preparations before the test being taken.

The targeted school had an ITBS pep rally the day before the tests began. There were inspirational speakers, a teacher skit, and encouraging words from the principal. There were no reports of high performance schools in the district doing this.

Wiggins (1990) found that tests need to stimulate real world abilities and knowledge. The validity on most multiple choice tests determines if the content of the curriculum has been mastered. Low scores from an ITBS test do not necessarily define a student's lack of knowledge or reading ability.

Assessment support comes from Eisner (1999) who noted performance assessments as a very important topic. Performance assessments are much more authentic measurements of a student's abilities than conventional forms of standardized testing. Students of today need to be proficient in outlining problems, creating plans to address issues, assessing multiple outcomes, and adjusting decisions based on new information.

Reading scores of oral fluency, written accuracy, and reading comprehension are not at district proficient standards at the targeted school. Besides being 46 % minority, it is also a very transient school. Of the students being tested in the fall, only 67% of those students are available to be tested in the spring. Many of the students who transfer schools are in the needs category (not meeting district standards) and many students who transfer are in the meets or exceeds category.

Students from the targeted school received only 18 weeks of visual art instruction from an art specialist in a 36 week year. Music and physical education are taught 36 weeks. Half time art made it very difficult to combine reading strategies and art content. Eisner (1972) found art needs to be a full part of any educational program. It develops the creative abilities of the individual. Art actively develops student's understanding of other academic subject areas.

The purpose of learning to read and write was for students to express themselves in a narrative written method and improve their intellectual educational

abilities. Recently, it has become evident that third grade students are not able to proficiently meet the basic district standards in reading. It is also evident that as budgets are cut so are the visual art instruction times. Art educations purpose was to teach students how to express thoughts, ideas, and feelings visually and to improve multifaceted tasks connected with multiple intelligences. Now students are asked to express their visual world with more difficult reading standards with half the instruction time of visual art than of all the other content areas.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

Now recognized by the professional and educational field, literacy development begins for a child at birth. It is a life long process (Neuman & Roskos, 2000). Learning to read is not a natural process. For a student to learn how to read component skills, phonics, phonemic awareness, sounding out, and blending are necessary. When a child enters school reading and writing are the most fundamental and essential tools to learn for success in education. Everything else she learns will be based on these two skills (Bryan & Bradley, 1985). If a child is a poor reader in third grade, it will be very difficult for her to become a successful reader. With out reading success in the elementary grades it will be extremely difficult to succeed at the secondary levels of education (Moats, 2001).

This researcher, being the art specialist for the targeted school, used the National Research Council determined factors to improve reading scores by implementing art content reading instruction and implementing reading strategies during art instruction. These factors were: Inability to attain oral fluency, failure to understand or use the alphabet principals, and failure to acquire and use comprehension skills and strategies to get meaning from text (National Academies Press, 1999).

Art develops the creative abilities of the individual Eisner (1972) reported that there are many justifications for art content in education. Art develops a good use of leisure time. Art gives students an opportunity to express themselves using visual materials and displays. Art also develops fine motor coordination, which is helpful in a child's general development. Visual expression is a therapeutic method of developing critical thinking and problem solving skills. Eisner (1972) stated the most important aspect of Art Education in school is the unique contribution it makes to the individual student's experience with a gained understanding of the world.

The importance of reading success in kindergarten is evident with in the targeted school with the implementation of all day kindergarten and the pilot program for preschoolers for aged two to four. Novick (2000) reported if the child is not going to get literacy exposure at home then the child needs to be introduced to school before kindergarten. Neuman and Roskos (1998) discussed how important it was to provide children with reading opportunities to learn how to understand stories. Such experience models literary language not found in daily speech or interactions with caregivers.

The district had a concern to raise reading scores to proficiency standard levels. . The district attempted to measure students' educational achievements and gaps using rubric scales based on benchmarks and standards. Their goal was to reduce the achievement gap in reading scores among minority students and reduces the number of children who were not meeting district grade level proficiencies.

To improve a school or school system it is important to understand the scene. And because schools contain a mix of interacting factors, their improvement means gaining the knowledge of how the major parts of schools interact (Eisner, 1998).

The children of the targeted school arrived every morning with a set of their own concerns or problems. These concerns distract from their ability to succeed or desire to listen and learn (Payne, 1998). With a strategic plan and some activity hooks the classroom environment will offer comfort and safety and would desirably create relationships the student could build upon, develop trust with, and count on.

Classroom teachers may not have a deep knowledge of art, but they must understand art has a very important role with the developmental growth of a student in literacy expressions and connections (Ernst, 1995). The importance of visual art and art curriculum expands critical thinking as part of a holistic path to learning.

Reading comprehension is the underlying aspect of achieving success or not achieving success in reading assessments. A student can learn and recite the alphabet, a student can learn to write letters to make words and fill in blanks to complete sentences, but to read or to be read to and have an understanding of its purpose requires completely different skills (Eisner, 1995). He based his findings that art can do several things to help create a concrete learning situation to such an ambiguous area of reading. Artwork brings obscure and vivid parts of a passage together. Art helps develop emotions and understanding of written ideas. Art also brings together unity of text, makes the aesthetic experience possible, which is reading comprehension.

Writing is a part of literacy. Students are asked to write their experience from a field trip, or to write a summary or reflection about what they have just read, a rather difficult task for even the experienced writer. Ernst (1998) suggested writing is based on individual expression. By encouraging children to think in picture form or write with a

visual image in their mind, or make a drawing first, they will have more content for ideas to start writing summaries or reflections.

There is an academic importance of art education. Art should not be thought of or treated as just another break or release time from the students for a classroom teacher. Giving the opportunities to children about learning and how to create visual art opens up the interesting world that surrounds them. Students who are involved in formal visual art instruction learn the weight of vocabulary definitions, making evaluations, and understanding how working in groups can be helpful to achieve goals. Visual art also develops individual self esteem by allowing students to have positive experiences with in the classroom school setting (National PTA, 2002).

Art is a communication device that must be developed by an art instructor specialist. An art teacher has the necessary tools and knowledge to develop visual art language and understanding. Art begins as soon as a child can pick up a utensil and scribble on a surface (Kelloge, 1979). Children who are encouraged to continue to scribble and given materials to create pictures, over time will have greater control of their drawing lines and later written letter development. Development will increase as experiences increase and drawing and painting will become more deliberate. Figg (2001) revealed more time involved and more exposure to visual art will increase a student's visual awareness and develop a stronger sense of visual expression. Chapman (1993) reported the intellectual and emotional connections made to visual art will increase a students ability to problem solve and create the comfort of self expression which will develop a more positive and authentic learner.

Students need to be computer literate, but also need to have the skills to create art as a communicative device. As technology expands worldwide the importance of visual understanding and development has become more definite. Computers generate much of what students experience in school today. Ohler (2000) focused on computers requiring students to establish thoughts and communicate ideas as designer and artist. This puts visual art in education as the fourth 'R'. Students need to be computer literate, but also need to have the skills to create art as a communicative device. Eisner (1998) stated future generations of students would need extensive art backgrounds for prospects of employment.

Project Objectives and Processes

After a student has successfully been assessed in his academic areas specifically reading, he still has to work towards a goal in creativity, self expression, and employment variables defined and supported by visual art education.

As a result of the direct use of reading strategies in visual art instruction class and increased specific art content activities during reading instruction during the period of September 2002 to January 2003, the targeted third grade class will improve oral fluency, written accuracy, and reading comprehension scores as measured by assessment tests, teacher check lists, anecdotal records, and the collection of writing samples.

Processes to be used to implement these objectives include the following during visual art instruction and regular classroom reading block time.

a) Adapt the art curriculum to aide reading strategy implementations of Think aloud and Read aloud.

b) Create a word wall in the art room with third grade words of fluency to use in art activities and projects.

c) Design art lessons using district language arts standards and benchmarks.

d) Add oral presentations and written reflections to art project completion.

In the regular educational classroom:

a) Adapt reading curriculum to emphasize art content.

b) Add an art activity to student's two hour reading block stations.

c) Read orally to students 20 minutes per day.

All data from targeted third grade will be compared to a controlled third grade class not receiving the above specified interventions for achievement comparisons.

Project Action Plan

This plan was developed based on a three day cycle. The classroom teacher and reading specialist will help gather base line data, administer tests and provide assessment data throughout the sixteen week plan.

Action Plan

Week 1

Art Instruction- Introduce vocabulary words of fluency word wall. Practice word terms. Create pencil drawings using fluency words.
Reading Instruction- Begin collecting baseline data for reading levels, word identification, reading fluency, and reading comprehension levels from both classes.
Read aloud twenty minutes.

Week 2

Art Instruction- Eric Carle/ Chicken Little Lesson: Students will participate in oral reading of text and create a unique picture illustrating story using Carle's collage technique.
Reading Instruction- Continue collecting data. Introduce reading block stations including art content station.
Read aloud 20 minutes.

Week 3

Art Instruction- Language expressed through a pinhole camera lesson. Students will be involved in a real experience they will want to write about.
Reading Instruction- Lights, Camera, and Action Verbs lesson: Students will dramatize 24 action verbs to strengthen sequencing, reading, writing, and spelling. Discuss expectations of reading block behavior.
Read aloud 20 minutes.

Week 4

Art Instruction- Display photos: Students will write a story about personal photo and develop a two minute PMI presentation of photo.
Reading Instruction- Students will continue action verb lesson. Begin reading group station rotation.
Read aloud 20 minutes.

Week 5

Art Instruction- Australian poster lesson: Students will create an art poster based on learned knowledge of Australia. (Australia is the site for the Summer Olympics 2004)
Reading Instruction- Read aloud strategy about Australia. Display art posters.
Read aloud 20 minutes.

Week 6

Art Instruction- Vincent Van Gogh Starry Night lesson: Display painting for students. Have class discussion about emotions created by painting and words used from word wall. Students will create a line movement drawing with pencil, pen and ink, and water color.
Reading Instruction- Begin mid semester reading assessments. There will be an added component of conclusions with drawings for the art content station.
Read aloud 20 minutes.

Week 7

Art Instruction- Painting lesson from Starry Night project: Students will create PMI oral presentations of their finished painting.
Reading Instruction- Word recognition checklists will be taken.
Read aloud 20 minutes.

Week 8

Art Instruction- Students will give oral presentations of their paintings.
Reading Instruction- Think aloud strategy will be used for history about Van Gogh.
Read aloud 20 minutes.

Week 9

Art Instruction- Narrative relief ceramic tile lesson: Students will pick a proper name and sculpt it in clay to make a tile.
Reading instruction- Use read aloud strategy about ceramic pottery and hand building techniques. Students will write summary about pottery.
Read aloud 20 minutes.

Week 10

Art Instruction- Comic Strip lesson: Use think aloud strategy with a popular comic strip. Students will learn comic drawing techniques to simplify, humorize, and cartoonify people and objects.
Reading Instruction- Use read aloud strategy about famous cartoonists. Students will write a comic strip.
Read aloud 20 minutes.

Week 11

Art Instruction- Cartooning multiple panel lesson: Students will develop skills to create character development, panel balance, speech bubbles, thought bubbles, and narration.
Reading Instruction- Students will finish comic strip stories and outline fluency words used in stories.
Read aloud 20 minutes.

Week 12

Art Instruction- Students will begin drawing cartoon ideas from prepared stories.
Reading Instruction- Students will continue drawing comic strips writing in dialogues.
Read aloud 20 minutes.

Week 13

Art Instruction- Students will finish pencil drawings of comic strips and outline them with black ink. Cartoons will be colored with markers, colored pencils, and water color paint.
Reading Instruction- Students will practice reading their comic strips and then read them to a first grade reading buddy.
Read aloud 20 minutes.

Week 14

Art Instruction- Norman Rockwell art history lesson: Students will identify appropriate vocabulary from word wall and create a self portrait using pencil, black marker, and tempera paint.
Reading Instruction: Write a story about being a famous artist. Share stories in reading groups.
Read aloud 20 minutes.

Week 15

Art Instruction- Pablo Picasso letter design lesson: Students will be put into cooperative groups. Groups will pick a fluency word. Each individual will take a letter and use Picasso's Cubism method to create a design. Groups will put letters together for a short PMI presentation and reflection.
Reading Instruction- Students will work on group reflections of Picasso lesson.
Read aloud 20 minutes.

Week 16

Art Instruction- Finish cooperative group presentations, hand out and review study guide for the end of the semester art test.
Reading Instruction- Posttest and assessments will begin.
Read aloud 20 minutes.

Week 17

Art Instruction- Administer test to students.
Reading Instruction- Posttest assessment data gathering will end.
Read aloud 20 minutes.

Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the effects of adapting reading strategies into the art curriculum and adding specific art content activities to the reading block stations, pretests, posttests, will be administered to all third grade students. The Retelling assessment and words of fluency spelling tests will measure student's oral fluency and written accuracy. The DRA assessment and the ITBS test will measure student's reading comprehension levels and performance.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of this project was to improve the scores of oral fluency, written accuracy, and reading comprehension of third grade students by using visual art content. The steps taken were giving pretests, applying art content interventions in the regular education classroom, and using reading strategies during formal visual Art Instruction. Observational checklists, anecdotal records were on going during the projects implementation. Posttests and assessments followed interventions.

The three areas of improvement were oral fluency, written accuracy, and reading comprehension. Oral fluency is based on fluent and phrased reading. It should sound as if the reader is telling a story. Reading in this fashion helps a student to better understand the author's intent of writing. Reading fluently also helps the overall comprehension of the story. A reader that struggles too often or has difficulty decoding unknown words, comprehension becomes difficult. The reading becomes word to word rather than understanding the meaning of the story or passage. Retelling records, fluency word vocabulary tests, and anecdotal records during students reading were assessments for oral fluency.

Written accuracy is based on a student's writing. A student, who has developed a core of known words, fluent words, and words commonly used in reading and writing, can more quickly and easily write a story. These words should be able to be written without much effort on the part of the writer. Knowing how to write these words automatically allows a student to concentrate on more difficult sounding words. This will allow for the meaning of the story to sound more fluent. Spelling tests, observational checklists, and collecting story samples from students were the assessments used for written accuracy.

Reading comprehension is reading text for meaning. If a student is not reading for meaning, there is no point to reading. If a student does not understand the reading it becomes merely a recitation of words. Pictures help students understand meaning. Teachers discuss with students the pictures on each page of a new story by taking a picture walk through the book. This allows the language of the book to be shared and understood. There may be some tricky parts of the story to strengthen the reader's abilities. By doing this, the teacher is introducing the story to the students. Observational checklists of oral retelling's establishing main idea, problem, conflict, solution, and character development were made for assessment. The ITBS standardized test was also used to measure a student's reading comprehension abilities.

Visual art is a means to create and transfer meaning. It is an attempt to exchange thoughts, to shape ideas. It is a visual expression of feelings, to share a perceived notion. From these vantage points the concepts of communication, oral and written, begin to identify themselves from students.

In order to determine the need to raise oral fluency, written accuracy, and reading comprehension scores, fall scores were investigated of fourth grader students from the targeted school reports and district reports from the year 2000 and 2001. Table 4 shows these results.

Table 4

Targeted School and District Comprehensive Reading Proficiency scores of Fourth Grade Students

Year	Targeted School Proficiency Scores	District Proficiency Scores
Fall of 2000	49 %	65 %
Fall of 2001	60 %	82 %

The district goal is to have all fourth grader students at a 75% comprehensive reading proficiency level for promotion to fifth grade. There was improvement, but still below the district goal.

Prior to the implementation of interventions, discussions with the third grade team and the reading specialist occurred. Discussion topics represented the need for interventions and types of interventions to implement. All agreed that the visual art interventions would not interfere and could only compliment other program incentives all ready on going. The two third grades would be labeled group A as experimental receiving interventions, and group B as a control not receiving interventions as specified in this project.

The first step was gathering base line data from both groups A and B. The reading specialist and her assistant administered the tests and assessments for oral fluency, written accuracy, and reading comprehension. The classroom teachers administered the words of fluency test along with collecting writing samples from the students.

A district rubric had been established along with assessment devices, which were used to analyze the data collected. There were 21 students in group A and 18 students in group B. After the Retelling assessment test was administered the results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Third Grade Rubric Scores and Number of Students in Each Category for Retelling Assessment for Fall 2002

Group	7 and Below (Needs)	8-9 (Meets)	10 (Exceeds)
Group A	8	6	7
Group B	6	8	5

Table 5 shows eight students from group A and six students from group B not meeting third grade level oral fluency or written accuracy standards.

After the DRA assessment test was administered the results were as follows in Table 6.

Table 6

Third Grade DRA Reading Comprehension reading levels Pretest Data Fall 2002

Group	Below 3.1	At 3.1	Above 3.1
A (21 students)	12	6	3
B (19 students)	9	6	4

Using the district rubric to score the DRA data, 12 students in group A and 9 students in group B were below district standards for students entering third grade.

Other data, which were collected weekly, were the words of fluency test, spelling tests, and collection of writing samples. After all initial data was collected it was decided classroom observations and checklists would occur on a three day cycle. Day one and two students would receive interventions in the regular education classroom during reading block instruction, and day three in the art room during visual Art Instruction. Group B would not receive any interventions as specified in this project.

An overview of the reading strategies and assessment schedule was introduced at the beginning of the project followed by direct instruction of the reading strategies and visual art content to be used. The project covered a 17 week period. The project was completed on time as specified by the plan.

Classroom observations began with the teacher from group A introducing the reading block plan. The teacher explained each station in a very detailed and thorough manner with the inclusion of the visual art content station. This station was where the student would have a visual example instead of a written sample to finish a story based on problems, conflicts, or solutions. Also, drawings were necessary to illustrate main

ideas of passages. Check lists and anecdotal records were kept through out the project period.

The next implementation of the project was introducing a reading strategy during formal visual Art Instruction of group A. The words of fluency were put on a word wall similar to the one in the targeted group's classroom. It was introduced and used in every lesson. The Think aloud and Read aloud reading strategies were used to introduce art lessons. A book, a portion of a book, or passage was read to group A. Inferring questions of predicting, conflicts, and conclusions stimulated a visual format for the students to create drawings and designs.

By the end of the 16 weeks group A and group B were assessed using the same test and format as in week 1. Spelling tests, words of fluency tests, classroom checklists, and anecdotal records were on going throughout the projects progress.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

The instructional reading strategies with the inclusion of art content resulted in the students being more involved in the stories. By the end of the project students were adding more words and sentences to describe their artwork or the main idea of the story than was required. During Art Instruction, by week 12 students were sharing their ideas in small, cooperative groups, by week 14 individual and group presentations were being made.

After the implementation of all interventions, posttest and assessments were made for both groups. The Retelling posttest data is as follows in Table 7.

Table 7

Posttest Retelling assessment for Third Grade Students January 2003

Group	7 and Below (Needs)	8-9 (Meets)	10 (Exceeds)
A (21 students)	2	11	8
B (19 students)	5	8	6

The target group A showed an improvement of oral fluency and written accuracy by 12 students. Group B showed an improvement of 2 students.

The DRA assessment showed results in Table 8.

Table 8

Third Graded DRA Posttest Assessment Data January 2003

Group	Below 3.1	At 3.1	Above 3.1	At or Above 3.7
A (21 students)	5	7	9	6
B (19 students)	4	5	6	4

This table shows a performance improvement of 13 students from group A also an improvement performance of 7 students from group B. It should be noted that the At or Above 3.7 assessment level is only added after 18 weeks of school. Six students from group A and 4 students from group B scored in this category.

The words of fluency test were administered after 16 weeks of the project's implementation. The results were as follows in Table 9.

Table 9

Third Grade Words of Fluency Test Scoring Percentages January 2003

Group	90-94%	95-97%	98-100%
A (21 students)	7	7	7
B (19 students)	8	8	3

Table 9 shows the results that there weren't any students from either group scoring below 90%. There were not any perfect scores recorded. For third grade students, 98-100% was the district standard for a 36 week proficiency.

The third grade students took the ITBS test in the fall of 2002. The results were as follows in Table 10.

Table 10

Third Grade ITBS Reading Comprehension Test Result Percentage Proficiency Analysis Fall 2003

Group	4-15%	16-24%	25-42%	43-54%	55-88%
A (21 students)	9	2	6	3	1
B (19 students)	3	2	5	8	1

The results of the ITBS test showed 20 students from group A and 18 students from group B below 55% proficient. The school goal was to be above 58% proficiency compared to a district average of 62% proficiency. The district grade level standard for third grade proficiency on the ITBS was 70%.

In the targeted group A the classroom behavior significantly improved with the inclusion of the art center during reading block and reading strategies implemented during formal Art Instruction as documented in classroom observations and anecdotal records. Control group B did not share in any measurable positive changes in behavior during reading block or during formal Art Instruction. Results were diagnosed from anecdotal records and classroom observational check lists from the art instructor only.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study showed apparent differences in performance levels in student achievement between groups A and B. Inclusion of art content in the reading block and implementing reading strategies during visual Art Instruction helped to make a positive difference in assessment scores of third grade students.

One recommendation to do differently would have been to establish planning meetings well in advance of the start of the projects implementation with the reading specialist, classroom teachers, and myself. Time was lost coordinating group meetings that competed with building meetings before the first day of school. The initial task of collecting pretest data and assessments was very difficult. The individuals I had outlined my project with in the spring of 2001 were moved into other positions because there was a loss of funding. I would also have recruited more help or acquired at least one more person to cooperate my project with. My data were rather narrow and were very time consuming to assess myself. Another recommendation would have been to improve the schedule of the project. Instead of two days observations in the classroom and one day in the art room 30-40 minutes at a time, a more beneficial approach would have been two days in the classroom and two days in the art room for 15 minutes at a time, and using the

fifth day for weekly assessments and collaboration of the projects progress. I would also improve lesson plans. By the end of the project I had implemented a lesson plan template design, which describe the lesson, included the reading strategy, the benchmark and district standard for reading and art, the activity, and end of the lesson assessments, and a place to make notes. This design made recording observations and checklists much more efficient and applicable.

Before consideration of the choice of project, it should be well researched by the individual planning the project, with all abilities and limitations being viewed. My understanding of reading data and assessments was very limited before the beginning of this project. I spent hours learning assessment language and reading protocol, which could have been, spent on data collection and classroom observations. Training with the assessment and diagnostic tools would have been beneficial. There is so much to be learned by how a student reads or why he reads a certain way. I learned what to look for as the project progressed instead of being prepared for what to look for. Communication is another vital area for the success of any project. I should have had a meeting of my expectations with those I was dependant upon because of my lack of reading expertise and knowledge, with expectations of the project completion and assessment schedules.

The assessment instruments used and administered were very difficult to learn, I would liked to have received some training based on those instruments before the project began. I was spending much of my time catching up instead of enjoying the process of the project.

My action plan had a good outline. Some of the art lessons were new to me and didn't turn out exactly as planned or had to be modified. Some of the lessons were more

successful than others, but overall the students produced improved art works as compared to group B.

The project outcome was as I expected. Changes I would make, have fewer lessons and projects with in a 16 week project outline with a more defined method of assessment and collection of data, and spread the project out over a longer period of time. Also, have more assessment meetings to discuss students who are successful as well as those requiring more attention.

The interventions needed more time to flow fluidly without hardships or added pressure to the students. Posttest data collection of interventions needed to be more consistent and scheduled. Surprise data collection can be good, but consistently scheduled assessments, tests, and observations would allow for better understanding and documentation of gains and improvements. I would recommend additional research in this area.

Low reading scores are not just found in third grade students or just at this targeted school. Visual art is being cut wherever there are budget short falls. Dr. Elliot Eisner has experience in three fields, Arts Education, Curriculum Studies, and Qualitative Research Methodology. He identifies the practical uses of critical qualitative methods from the visual Art Instruction that are introduced in the classroom setting and teaching processes which have positive, and in some cases, enhanced score improving gains. Student experiences outside of school are seldom like those of schoolwork assigned. Visual art allows students to experience authentic adventures and outcomes, which are captured in reflections of drawings, paintings, or sculptures. These reflections are real and hardly ever happen like a multiple choice test (Eisner, 1998).

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