

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Reading achievement is the most recognized goal of students' enrollment at Oakland School. The individualized attention and intensive reading program results in greater reading success as evident through standardized testing and overall gains in reading achievement levels. Oakland is known for their reading program, more specifically "The Oakland Way"; a phonics program developed by the school's founder Margaret Shepherd, a pioneer in special education (oaklandschool, n.d.). It is based on the concepts of Orton Gillingham's program originally developed in the 1930's; Oakland's program incorporates multisensory techniques to better understand the English language, recognize rules and their exceptions, identify key sounds and letter sound combinations, and divide and decode multi-syllable words, thus reading with greater accuracy, understanding and fluency (Shepherd, 1980).

Completion of "The Oakland Way" program ensures students are exposed to key elements of the traditional multisensory approach which include key sounds and pictures, seven rules for dividing and stories that correspond with the rules of the English language. In addition to the auditory and visual techniques just described, the program incorporates kinesthetic learning through hand written instructional involvement (chalk board design of the classroom), and tracing packets of Dolch words, sight vocabulary, and key words that correspond to basal readers (Shepherd, 1980).

It is believed that reading may be the most important acquired skill for any given person and directly impacts all other achievements (Wallace, as cited in Shepherd, 1980). The Oakland School Program has been effective for over sixty years incorporating daily individualized instruction and “The Oakland Way” phonics instruction to transform students into readers, readers into learners and learners into successful adults.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study was to determine the gains in yearly reading achievement levels of first year Oakland School students completing “The Oakland Way” phonics instruction to predict future first year Oakland School student success?

Hypothesis

The following hypothesis was developed to guide the research study:

H₁: When students complete “The Oakland Way” phonics instruction they will achieve greater yearly reading achievement levels as measured by yearly Gates MacGinitie standardized reading achievement tests.

Background and Significance

Reading gains have been a continual goal for educators and are often used as a means to determine student success. Reading achievement often serves as a predictor of future academic success. Thus, providing students with essential instruction and working to bridge the gap between achievement and potential is key. With the understanding that reading success predicts future academic success, it is teacher’s responsibility to develop research based best strategies to ensure student success.

Oakland School was established in 1950 to better serve students with learning differences. Although no specific diagnosis is required for acceptance or attendance, the majority of students attending Oakland have specific learning disabilities related to reading such as dyslexia (oaklandschool, n.d.). Unfortunately, students most often experience failure or struggles prior to inquiry at Oakland School. They are frequently performing below grade level with the greatest deficits in reading. Thousands of students have been “saved” due to the dedication and quality instruction at Oakland School, and word of mouth is Oakland’s greater referral source (oaklandschool, n.d.). However, it is becoming more prominent for future families to need and want more quantitative information to justify the expense of a special education private school. In answering questions about gains at Oakland, the general response is students typically achieve 1 ½ years gain per school year, thus bridging the gap between academic performance and overall student potential. Data and documentation do exist due to yearly standardized academic testing; however, in recent years, it has yet to be collected in a research study, analyzed and presented to the teachers, board of directors, current parents, and prospective families for review.

General studies have been conducted throughout the years; however, results are unavailable due to lack of documentation. Although the professionals who established the school, fostered the program, and influenced the instruction and key elements of success that continue to be the foundation of the program, research of school data is limited. The only published study concerning Oakland School’s reading program and analyzed student reading achievement was completed by Seltzer and Abidin (1981).

Research validates that phonics instruction is essential when teaching students how to read. Understanding the components of “The Oakland Way” and how those techniques prove beneficial when teaching students with learning differences to increase reading achievement levels is essential as reading is the most valuable way for persons to obtain information, thus grow academically (Handler & Fierson, 2011).

Intensive reading instruction combined with phonics instruction seems to work. It is the goal of this study to highlight “The Oakland Way” program and techniques to better predict the success of future Oakland School students.

This study proves significant because the problem will allow a greater study of “The Oakland Way” and give specific, valid, information and data that teachers, parents and educational professionals can use to guide instruction, determine appropriateness of placement and promote the school. Through the collection of reading testing data, overall averages of students’ reading gains will be determined and generalizations can predict future successes.

This study is essential as it will provide the results needed to reassure educators of the importance of “The Oakland Way”. As special education continues to evolve, it is evident that research based best practices and research, in general, is essential to guide instruction, determine student placement and impact funding decisions.

Limitations

Limitations of this study include the following:

1. Standardized reading achievement using the Gates MacGinitie Tests will be conducted, evaluated and documented in the classroom and student files.
Limitations of this study are a result of given testing limitations. Student testing results can vary due to a number of reasons including energy level, attitude, nourishment, illness, distractions, etc.
2. Additional outside variables such as absenteeism, illness and tutoring services offered outside of the school environment can impact/influence student achievement.
3. Although “The Oakland Way” is taught to the group in a structured manner, individual variances do occur. As with all students, variables exist that are beyond the limits of the tester and the study.

Assumptions

The following assumptions are made throughout the study.

1. Phonics instruction is beneficial when teaching student with learning disabilities how to read and increase reading levels.
2. Using a multisensory approach, such as “The Oakland Way”, increases understanding, retention, and greater achievement.
3. Furthermore, students with learning differences benefit from daily individualized instruction combined with specific phonetic instruction.
4. The combination of “The Oakland Way” phonics program, utilizing a multisensory approach and intensive individualized attention, provides

essential instruction for struggling readers and will bridge the gap between student performance and potential.

5. Establishing data that further demonstrates the connection between individualized instruction and “The Oakland Way” to achieve reading success for struggling readers will serve as a guide to justify future placements.

Procedures

Procedures for this study will include the collection of data using Standardized Reading Achievement Levels as measured by the Gates MacGinitie Reading Achievement Test. Testing takes place at enrollment (beginning of the summer term in June or year-round school in September) and at the end of the spring term (mid-May). All data will be collected as part of Oakland School’s typical testing and documentation. This study will further examine those results by applying statistical analysis of yearly standardized reading achievement results.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined to assist when reading this study:

The Oakland Way: Oakland School’s intensive individualized reading program that incorporates an intensive phonics program, to include the phonetic and structural analysis of words.

Multisensory Approach: Presenting information to students using a variety of modalities including auditory, visual, and kinesthetic techniques.

Tracing Packets: A packet of key vocabulary from a given basal. Packets are basal specific and contain one key word per page. Words are raised using a simple technique of tracing words over sandpaper to produce a tactile key word.

Schoolhouse: The specific classroom designed by Oakland School's founder, Margaret Shepherd. The classroom setup includes a room lined with student level chalkboards to work at during the specific phonics lesson. Chalkboards are used during instruction to incorporate tactile instruction during each lesson. It was also designed specifically to keep students focused and involved during class, allow ease of teacher monitoring, and give students the opportunity to show off their work and quickly erase any mistakes. The Schoolhouse is a vital element of "The Oakland Way" program.

Overview of Chapters

Chapter I serves as an introduction to the study. The problem is stated to establish reason and clarify need. A hypothesis is detailed that outlines the prediction of the study outcome and goals are introduced. The background, significance, limitations, assumptions and procedures for the study are also clearly detailed to provide a foundation for the reader and the study as we continue. A definition of terms was detailed to assist the reader when reviewing the paper and to foster understanding.

Chapter II will detail the Review of Literature of what has been tested and founded concerning Oakland School's key instructional strategies for improving reading. Key teaching techniques that incorporate phonics instruction and multisensory teaching techniques for struggling readers will be highlighted. In addition, the concept of

accountability will be addressed as a means to validate the teaching above teaching techniques and ensure the need for data driven decision making.

Chapter III will overview the methods and procedures conducted during this survey. Information about the teaching techniques and data collection using the Gates MacGinitie Reading Achievement Tests will be detailed. The chapter will further detail the specifics of “The Oakland Way” reading and phonics program including techniques, materials and application.

Chapter IV will detail the study findings including the data and data analysis. Furthermore, a collection of data will represent the findings of yearly reading testing achievement levels for Oakland School students. Likewise, the data will further determine the appropriateness of an individualized intensive reading program that incorporates phonics instruction to bridge the gap between struggling readers’ achievement and potential.

Chapter V will detail the summary, conclusions and recommendations from the study. The data will establish a quantitative review of the program and student gains to educate professionals about essential supports for students with learning differences, especially reading struggles. Finally, the study will hopefully spark the desire for further research on integral components of Oakland’s teaching techniques and overall student and school success.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A further examination of literature not only reinforces the need for this study in regards to reading, but further drives research and data collection to establish a foundation for phonics instruction for struggling readers. Further review will also promote Oakland School as a premier source for education for students with learning differences, all while providing a solid foundation in which to predict future success of students attending Oakland School. In addition, lack of specific research and data related to Oakland School should help spark future researchers and further research to examine similar teaching techniques, multisensory phonetic instruction, and individualized reading plans for struggling readers. Findings will focus on reading disabilities, key reading instruction and strategies for struggling readers, and accountability to ensure struggling students' success.

Struggling Readers

The reading process is complex. However, it is considered the greatest means by which to acquire information and is often viewed as a predecessor to success (Handler & Fierson, 2011). Dyslexia, the most common form of reading disability, impacts the way

student receive and perceive written print. Approximately eighty percent of all students with a diagnosed learning disability are dyslexic (Handler & Fierson, 2011). Typically, students with dyslexia or reading disabilities have deficits in phonological awareness, making it difficult to decode written words (Handler & Fierson., 2011). According to the International Dyslexia Association (IDA), students with dyslexia often find their greatest struggles in the areas of reading and writing (IDA, n.d.). Students with dyslexia often benefit from a reading program that incorporates individualized instruction with phonemic awareness, as poor decoding results in poor reading (Handler & Fierson, 2011).

Phonetic instruction is key when teaching students, young and old, how to read (Shepherd, 1980). The International Reading Association (IRA) produced a statement in 1997 establishing the importance of phonics in reading instruction. They identified phonics as being an important component in reading instruction. Likewise, the IRA suggests that embedding phonics in the overall reading curriculum is beneficial for students learning to read (Edwards, 2008). Systematic phonics instruction continues to be considered essential when teaching struggling learners how to read (Beverly, Giles, & Buck, 2002).

Phonics Instruction and the Multisensory Approach

With increase awareness about struggling students and increased knowledge of the specifics of their reading struggles, comes the need for data-driven instruction to bridge the gap between performance and potential. Evidence based research highlights the importance of phonics instruction to assist struggling readers (Edwards, 2008).

Students participating in direct phonics instruction make greater reading gains. Further research also indicates that a multi-sensory approach to instruction can be effective and beneficial when teaching students with learning disabilities. According to Rule, Dockstader and Stewart (2008) kinesthetic and tactile teaching strategies help to reinforce phonological awareness. In addition, their research validates the concepts that each student learns differently and one technique will not address the students' needs. As the human brain continues to evolve, it is likely that people learn and operate best in a multisensory environment (Shams & Seitz, 2008). Thus, teaching in a multisensory environment with multisensory instructional strategies would prove beneficial for all students. Learning skills and strategies through a variety of modalities ensures that our brains are absorbing the information, thus increasing understanding and retention of material. Some of the most influential and successful programs and educators have established curriculum that incorporates the multiple senses in their modes and means of instruction (Shams & Seitz, 2008).

Phonics at Oakland continues to concentrate on the key sounds with corresponding pictures, seven rules for dividing and exceptions to the English language (oaklandschool, n.d.). Students are active participants in the class, sitting along chalkboard lined walls to follow along, participate in class, follow instructions and learn from hearing, seeing, and doing (Shephard, 1980).

In addition to direct phonics instruction, "The Oakland Way" incorporates individualized daily one-to-one instruction that focuses on dividing and decoding words, increasing sight vocabulary through the use of tracing packets, and oral student and teacher reading. This intensive, individualized approach that utilizes phonetic instruction

and multisensory reading strategies is the foundation of Oakland's reading program, and thus, the foundation of student success.

Oakland School

Oakland School is a co-educational boarding and day school for students with learning disabilities. The low student to teacher ratio (5:1), individualized instruction and multisensory teaching techniques help bridge the gap between student performance and potential while fostering self-esteem to achieve overall student success (oaklandschool, n.d.). Prior research documents yearly reading achievement results as 1.46 grade level achievement over a seven-month term and 1.78 grade level achievement over a nine-month term (Abidin & Seltzer, 1981). The overall program, specific phonics instruction (The Oakland Way), mission and philosophy follows:

The entire staff of Oakland School is committed to creating a nurturing environment in which the particular academic, emotional, and social needs of each student will be met. We recognize that every child is unique and learns differently and that an academic program must be tailored for each individual. Our goal is to encourage and help students achieve their potential so that they will develop a love of learning as well as a firm sense of self-worth and respect for themselves and others.

This philosophy has remained constant for over 60 years (oaklandschool, n.d.). It is the hope of this study to detail similar results to provide essential, current data to teachers, parents and others about proven teaching techniques and successes of struggling readers when instructed using key strategies.

Accountability

As accountability continues to be at the forefront of education, documenting data in an organized format is essential for teachers, administrations and schools (Vannest, Temple-Harvey & Mason, 2008). Adequate yearly progress (AYP) is used as a means to determine student academic success rates as mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (NCLB; 2001). Although Oakland School does not receive federal or state funding, the precedent for adequate progress and standardized testing to document gains has been established. Likewise, utilizing reading testing achievement results to demonstrate gains is not only beneficial when making academic and instructional decisions, but it proves beneficial when justifying the need for student enrollment, school placements and curriculum development.

Gates MacGinitie Reading Achievement Testing

With the increasing demands for teacher accountability, the test, or standard of measure, is also becoming increasingly more important (Morsy, Kieffer & Snow, 2010). The Gates MacGinitie Reading Test is a general assessment of a students' reading

achievement. This test is a standardized assessment with norms and outcomes that can be determined to assess student ability, achievement and map progress. The test measures vocabulary knowledge during the twenty minute timed vocabulary section. This section is composed of short phrases containing the key word along with five multiple choice answers. The comprehension section measures a students' reading comprehension when given a short passage and a variety of questions, inferential and factual. Answers are, again, in the form of multiple choice (Morsy et al., 2010). The standardized test serves as a valid form of measuring yearly student gains in reading achievement.

Summary

In the Review of Literature, the importance of reading instruction is highlighted. In addition, the correlation between struggling readers and lack of phonemic awareness is noted. Research based best practices reflect the need for multisensory teaching techniques that incorporate phonics instruction along with individualized reading program to promote reading achievement gains. In addition, the Gates MacGinitie Reading Tests are used as a means to measure yearly reading achievement gains for this study. The Gates MacGinitie Reading Tests measure vocabulary and comprehension while also compiling a total score to measure and document student gains. As accountability becomes the staple for educational decision making in regards to teaching techniques, research based best practices, student achievement and instructional considerations of all levels. Utilizing proven techniques and presenting qualitative data to demonstrate success and predict future successes should be the force that drives instruction, placement and ultimately, overall success for students with learning differences. Data should be the foundation of education.

The following chapter will detail the methods and procedures used to obtain information and data for this study.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Chapter III describes the methods and procedures used to collect and analyze data for this study. The research was quasi-experimental and examines the influence of “The Oakland Way” phonics instruction, including key strategies that incorporate phonics instruction with multisensory teaching techniques for students struggling to read. Included in this chapter are the description of the population, research variables, instrument design, field procedures, methods of data collection, statistical analysis and summary.

Population

The population of this study is first year Oakland School students enrolled in “The Oakland Way” phonics course in conjunction with Oakland’s individualized academic program. All students are below grade level in reading, have a current IIP (Individualized Instruction Plan) developed by the school and are privately placed. The students during the 2011-2012 school year who meet these criteria included three female

students and nine male students ranging from ages eight to thirteen. The total number of students participating in this current study is eleven.

Research Variables

This study examines the effectiveness of “The Oakland Way” phonics program for struggling readers. The independent variable was the specialized reading program, “The Oakland Way”, to improve the reading skill and level of students with reading disabilities. The dependent variable was the measure of improved reading.

Instrument Design

The instrument used for assessment was the Gates MacGinitie Standardized Reading Achievement Test administered in June 2011, September 2011 or individualized initial start date prior to participating in the Phonics instruction, December 2011 as a mid-semester test date, and May 2012, after completing the initial course. The Data were collected using the grade level equivalencies of each section of the test, vocabulary and comprehension, as well as the total score per student. Grade level equivalencies are calculated using the standardized testing norms for each grade level test, provided by the testing publisher, Riverside Publishing.

Classroom Procedures

Students receive 60 minutes of instruction each day in “The Oakland Way” phonics course in conjunction with an individualized program and daily one-to-one instruction. The phonics instruction focuses on key letter sounds, vowel sounds, vowel teams, diagraphs and diphthongs. Each sound has a corresponding picture (apple-a,

Eskimo-e, igloo-i, oxen-o, and usher-u) to assist students with auditory, visual and kinesthetic learning. Standardized testing occurs in the classroom, the first day of school and final week of school, as a part of the standard procedures for reading testing and measurement, data collection and documentation required by Oakland School.

Methods of Data Collection

Oakland School was chosen for this study to highlight their long-standing multisensory teaching techniques and proven track record of success for struggling readers. Testing occurs and results documented as standard procedure. The data is documented in the test record booklet as grade equivalencies for all students. Testing is documented using grade level equivalencies scores for the timed portion of the test and scores that represent the student's achievement when given extra time to complete the test. The vocabulary section has a 20 minute time limit, the comprehension section has a 35 minute time limit, as standard procedure.

Statistical Analysis

The data will be analyzed using statistical analysis to determine the results of yearly reading achievement for those students completing the "The Oakland Way". Yearly averages, means and total gains will be determined to document student success and highlight student achievement once completing the "The Oakland Way" Phonics course. Grade level equivalencies will be used to determine overall achievement and gain.

Summary

In Chapter III, methods and procedures for this study were examined. The population was identified as male and female students completing the “The Oakland Way” phonics instruction at Oakland School in the 2011-2012 school year. The Gates MacGinitie Standardized Reading Achievement Tests will be used to document student achievement prior to and after completion of the course to determine the grade level equivalency gains in vocabulary, comprehension and total student score. Results will include timed and untimed grade level equivalencies for each student. In Chapter IV, research findings will be reported.

Chapter IV

Findings

This chapter will detail findings of the study. The problem was to determine the gains in yearly reading achievement levels of first year Oakland school students completing “The Oakland Way” phonics instruction to predict future first year Oakland School student success. Individual grade equivalency scores were collected and analyzed to determine overall average gains in vocabulary, comprehension, and total scores on the Gates MacGinitie Reading Achievement Test. The Data were collected from eleven students at the predetermined testing dates of the initial test date, mid-year test date (December) and the end of year test date (May).

The scores were separated into groups according to the test section and date of testing. All testing was completed in the classroom as standard school procedure.

Data Analysis

The variables were the specialized reading program, “The Oakland Way”, and the measure of improved reading. Scores obtained from the standardized Gates MacGinitie Reading Achievement Test in vocabulary, comprehension, and total score in the form of grade level equivalencies were recorded, totaled, averaged and detailed to show overall gain.

Scores obtained from the December test record indicate an overall first semester gain of 1.13 grade level equivalency on the vocabulary section, an overall gain of 2.54

grade level equivalency on the comprehension section, and an overall gain of 1.83 on total test section. Table 1 outlines first semester gains.

Scores obtained from the May test record indicate an overall second semester gain of .43 grade level equivalency on the vocabulary section, an overall gain of 1.93 grade level equivalency on the comprehension section, and an overall gain of .83 on the total test section. Table 2 outlines second semester gains.

Scores obtained from the May test record indicate an overall yearly gain of 2.18 grade equivalency on the vocabulary section, an overall yearly gain of 3.34 grade equivalency on the comprehension section and an overall year gain of 2.9 grade equivalency on the total test section. The gains reflect the overall yearly average gain for students completing “The Oakland Way” phonics instruction. Table 3 outlines yearly gains.

Table 1

First semester grade equivalency gains for students completing “The Oakland Way” phonics instruction at the December test date

Test Section	Vocabulary	Comprehension	Total score
Grade Level Equivalency	1.13	2.54	1.83

Table 2

Second semester grade level equivalency gains for students completing “The Oakland Way” phonics instruction at the May test date

Test Section	Vocabulary	Comprehension	Total score
Grade Level Equivalency	.43	1.93	.83

Table 3

Yearly grade level equivalency gains for students completing “The Oakland Way” phonics instruction

Test Section	Vocabulary	Comprehension	Total score
Grade Level Equivalency	2.18	3.34	2.9

Summary

Chapter IV reported the results of the data and research of the yearly reading achievement levels of first year Oakland School students completing “The Oakland Way” phonics instruction. The data from eleven students was collected at the initial start date, mid-year (first semester) date in December and end of year (May) date from the 2011-2012 school year. The data was analyzed using statistical analysis including mean of individual test score per semester and mean of yearly collective gains. The results were reported above. Chapter V will detail the summary, conclusion and recommendations derived from this study.

Chapter V

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This chapter will conclude the study. This chapter will include a summary to give a brief overview of the study. Conclusions are determined based on study outcomes. Recommendations will be detailed based on the conclusions of the study.

Summary

The problem of this study was to determine the gains in yearly reading achievement levels of first year Oakland School students completing “the Oakland Way” phonics program to predict future first year Oakland School student success. The hypothesis established for this study was:

H₁: When students complete “The Oakland Way” phonics instruction they will achieve greater yearly reading achievement levels as measured by yearly Gates MacGinitie standardized reading achievement tests.

Reading gains continues to be a goal for teachers and are often used to measure student success. Likewise, reading often serves as a predictor for future success. Understanding and implementing research based best practices is key to meeting student needs and bridging the gap between student achievement and student potential. The results of this study help further expand the knowledge that multisensory teaching strategies and specialized reading instruction such as “The Oakland Way” can ensure above average yearly reading gains for struggling readers. This study further provides educators,

administration and parents with key data that validates Oakland School's techniques and serves as a predictor for future Oakland School students' success.

The study had the following limitations:

1. Standardized reading achievement using the Gates MacGinitie Tests will be conducted, evaluated and documented in the classroom and student files.
Limitations of this study are a result of given testing limitations. Student testing results can vary due to a number of reasons including energy level, attitude, nourishment, illness, distractions, etc.
2. Additional outside variables such as absenteeism, illness and tutoring services offered outside of the school environment can impact/influence student achievement.
3. Although "The Oakland Way" is taught to the group in a structured manner, individual variances do occur. As with all students, variables exist that are beyond the limits of the tester and the study.

The population for this study included eleven first year Oakland School students participating in the "The Oakland Way" phonics instructions. Data were collected from the standardized Gates MacGinitie Reading Achievement Test as determined at the initial, mid-year and end of year test dates.

Conclusions

The following hypothesis was tested for this study:

H₁: When students complete “The Oakland Way” phonics instruction they will achieve greater yearly reading achievement levels as measured by yearly Gates MacGinitie standardized reading achievement tests.

Using statistical analysis to take a in-depth look at the reading achievement results allows us to fail to reject the above hypothesis. Data concludes that students participating in “The Oakland Way” phonics instruction have above average yearly gains in reading levels, including vocabulary, comprehension, and total score as measured by the Gates MacGinitie Reading Achievement Test. The data and conclusion prove beneficial for students, teachers, parents and administrators when developing goals and implementing best practices to best meet the needs of struggling students.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Encourage administration to collect and analyze standardized test data each year to further promote the benefits of multisensory phonics instruction.
2. Further research should be conducted analyzing the overall reading achievement gains as measured by the Gates MacGinitie Achievement Test over a ten year time period to gain a more accurate mean of student success.
3. Conduct a study to determine the average yearly reading achievement results of students enrolled at Oakland School not completing “The Oakland Way” phonics instruction to compare the difference in achievement.

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