

Learning to Teach the Grade 4 Early Intervention in Reading Program through Internet-Supported Professional Development

Barbara M. Taylor
Web Education Company
Edina, MN

Five grade 4 teachers from 4 schools in an intermediate school district participated in a 9-month professional development program designed to teach them how to use the Early Intervention in Reading (EIR) program with their struggling readers. Four grade 4 teachers and students from 3 schools in the same intermediate school district served as controls. The experimental schools had an average of 38.3 percent of students on subsidized lunch, and the control schools 37.7 percent (range across all schools 25-43%).

The grade 3-4 EIR program is for children who are not reading on grade level but who are reading on at least a year below grade level by fall. The program focuses on building students' reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. The program uses a cross-age tutoring component in which students work for four days on developing reading fluency through rereading and on strategies for decoding longer words and for understanding text, based on a narrative or informational picture book that they will read to an EIR student who is two grade levels below them.

In all of the experimental and control classrooms, the regular reading program was similar. All classes had 90-120 minutes a day of literacy instruction. What differed was that in experimental classes struggling readers received 30 minutes of EIR as part of

this reading block. EIR was not an additional 30 minutes of reading instruction for struggling readers in these classes, just a different form of instruction; instruction previously found to be effective in teaching struggling readers to read (Taylor, Short, Frye, & Shearer, 1992).

Experimental and control teachers reported using a basal reader program, trade books for guided reading, and the Accelerated Reading Program. The EIR children received no other targeted reading intervention. The control children did not receive a targeted reading intervention.

When asked about professional development on a teacher questionnaire, experimental and control teachers indicated that they were required by their state to complete 15 days of professional development over 3 years if they were in their first 3 years of teaching. It was recommended that they complete 5 days of professional development per year otherwise. Experimental and control teachers reported that they regularly attended professional development opportunities provided by the intermediate school district. These offerings focused on the following: literacy assessment (3 days), early literacy instruction (3 1/2 days), new reading or language art series (2 days), literacy centers (1 day), guided reading (1 day), reading comprehension (3 hours).

The professional development for experimental teachers replaced the typical professional development activities engaged in by other teachers in the district. This EIR Professional development began with an on-site 4-hour workshop led by an EIR master teacher. This was followed by 9 monthly 2-hour sessions in which teachers used Internet-delivered modules to guide their learning. These meetings ended with a 30-minute conference call with the EIR master teacher.

There were 31 experimental students and 19 control students. An analysis of variance on students' word correct per minute (wcpm) scores revealed that the experimental students scored higher in the spring than the control students, after controlling for fall scores, $F(1.49) = 5.25, p = .026$. Experimental students went from 96.6 (S.D. = 16.4) wcpm in the fall on average (on a grade 3 passage) to 109.3 wcpm on a grade 4 passage in the spring (S.D. = 15.5). Control students went from 110.1 (S.D. = 24.5) in the fall (on a grade 3 passage) to 101 in the spring (S.D. = 22.5). An analysis of variance on word recognition error scores revealed that the experimental students had fewer errors in the spring on a 100 word passage, ($M = 2.9, S.D. = 2.2$) than control students ($M = 5.2, S.D. = 4.3$), after controlling for fall scores, $F(1.49) = 6.56, p = .014$.

In spite of its limited scope, this study confirmed that the Internet-supported professional development program pertaining to the Early Intervention in Reading Program for grade 4 students was effective for the teachers who participated in it. Teachers indicated on a questionnaire that they were pleased with the progress of their students, and were pleased with the professional development sessions. Most importantly, the experimental students were performing better in reading in May than control students, as indicated by measures of word recognition accuracy and fluency.