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A Comparison of the Ginn 720 Basal Series with Total Reading in the Albany Area Schools

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This thesis submitted by William J. Krogman in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science by St. Cloud State University is hereby approved by the final evaluation committee.

**A COMPARISON OF THE GINN 720 BASAL SERIES WITH
TOTAL READING IN THE ALBANY AREA SCHOOLS**

by

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A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of

St. Cloud State University

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Master of Science

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August, 1992

This thesis submitted by William J. Krogman in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Science at St. Cloud State University is hereby approved by the final evaluation committee.

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This study follows one group of students who began first grade in 1984 through third grade in 1986. This group of students was taught reading in the Ginn 720 Basal series. These students reading percentages were compared with a group of students who began first grade in 1988 and completed third grade in 1991. These students were taught reading through Total Reading.

It was found that Total Reading significantly improve the reading percentiles of those students who were in the Total Reading program. In several quartiles, the

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This study follows one group of students who began first grade in 1984 through third grade in 1986. This group of students was taught reading in the Ginn 720 Basal series. These students reading percentages were compared with a group of students who began first grade in 1988 and completed third grade in 1990. These students were taught reading through Total Reading.

It was found that Total Reading did not significantly improve the reading percentiles of those students who went through the Total Reading program. In several quartiles, the Ginn series outperformed Total Reading.

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Although no studies were made to determine if test scores actually were declining, in 1988 it was decided by the Albany Area Schools Reading/Language Arts Curriculum Committee and by the Board of Education that the district should investigate the possibility of incorporating into a new curriculum either a new program, a new basal series to replace the existing Ginn 720 basal series, or to adapt the existing series into new objectives developed by the committee. Ultimately it was decided to replace the Ginn 720 series with a program entitled "Total Reading" (Johnston, 1981) for Grades 1 through 3 and a Scribner basal series for Grades 4 through 5.

Several factors entered into this decision. According to Mr. William Hakes, Elementary School Principal (W. Hakes, personal communication, June 24, 1991), several influences moved the committee and the Board into

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

As early as 1971, the Superintendent of Schools in the Albany district, Dr. Duane Hill, indicated to the Board of Education that a disproportionate number of students in the Albany district were reading below what he felt were acceptable levels. By comparing Albany's test percentiles with National test percentiles, Hill came to the conclusion that students in the Albany district were performing in sub-standard fashion (D. Hill, personal communication, June 22, 1991).

Although no studies were made to determine if test scores actually were declining, in 1986 it was decided by the Albany Area Schools Reading/Language Arts Curriculum Committee and by the Board of Education that the district should investigate the possibility of incorporating into a new curriculum either a new program, a new basal series to replace the existing Ginn 720 basal series, or to adapt the existing series into new objectives developed by the committee. Ultimately it was decided to replace the Ginn 720 series with a program entitled "Total Reading" (Johnston, 1981) for Grades 1 through 3 and a Scribner basal series for Grades 4 through 6.

Several factors entered into this decision. According to Mr. William Hakes, Elementary School Principal (W. Hakes, personal communication, June 24, 1991), several influences moved the committee and the Board into

accepting a new direction in reading education for Grades 1 through 3 Albany area students.

First there was general dissatisfaction among the staff with the Ginn 720 series. It was felt that Ginn did not offer the necessary phonics background needed for the students to become effective readers.

Second, the committee was influenced by a United States Department of Education (1986) report entitled "What Works: Research About Teaching and Learning." This report reaffirmed ideas that the committee already had. The report stated that good readers need parental support, that children improve in reading if they read a lot, and that children get a better start in reading if they are taught phonics.

A third influence was the Commission on Reading's report, "Becoming a Nation of Readers: The Report on the Commission on Reading." This report emphasized that "Phonics should be taught early and for the most part be finished by second grade. Phonics should also be taught systematically" (Binkley, 1986, p. 7). Further, the report emphasized constant, extended writing. The report states: "Extended writing activities consistently have shown to have a positive impact on student's comprehension" (Binkley, 1986, p.19).

A fourth factor was attendance by several committee members at a workshop entitled M.E.E.P. (Minnesota Educational Effectiveness Program). This workshop affected the way many committee members viewed the school district's delivery of instructional objectives to students. M.E.E.P emphasized flexible grouping and whole language learning in reading instruction (W. Hakes, personal communication, June 24, 1991).

Finally, according to John Roscoe, Reading Coordinator for the district, the committee was looking for a program that was multisensory, highly literature based, providing whole group, heterogeneous instruction and a high level of emphasis on the written language (J. Roscoe, personal communication, May 27, 1991). It should be noted here that the committee's objectives and goals were stated before selecting a program to be used in instruction. The Total Reading Program seemed to fit these objectives and goals.

This inquiry looks at two separate groups of elementary students in Grades 1 through 3 as they progressed through Albany District 745 elementary schools. The first group attended District 745 schools in the years 1984 through 1986. These students were taught reading through the Ginn 720 series. The second group of students attended District 745 schools in the years 1988 through 1990. These students were taught reading through Total Reading. The purpose of this study is to determine whether Total Reading, a hybrid whole language program, produced significantly better reading results than the Ginn 720 basal series. By looking at the Iowa Test of Basic Skills percentile rankings for students in the district as they compared to national percentile rankings, this investigator should be able to see if significant numbers of the Total Reading students were placed in higher quartiles than the Ginn reading group.

Definition of Terms

Scribner Basal Reading Series. Regular basal program. Copyrighted in 1987, the Scribner Series provides sequential reading skill instruction.

Ginn 720. Copyrighted in 1976, the 720 series is a revision of the Ginn 360 series. The revision places more emphasis on comprehension and teaching strategies.

Total Reading. Developed and published by the Total Reading Foundation, copyright 1981, Total Reading is a modified whole language program that does include a sequence of decoding skills. The program is highly literature based, develops listening skills, develops writing skills, and develops language arts skills.

Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS). The standardized test used in many schools throughout the country, including Albany. The ITBS is designed by looking at selected norming districts. These districts become representative samples of what is being taught in the United States at each grade level. The Iowa Test of Basic Skills is not developed with any one program or method of instruction in mind.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Basal Programs

Harste (1989) states, "Reading comprehension is not so much a matter of extracting meaning from text as it is making meaning with text" (p. 277).

In the publication Becoming a Nation of Readers: Implications for Teachers Binkley (1986) lists five ways to describe skilled reading: (a) skilled reading is a constructive process, (b) skilled reading must be fluent, (c) skilled reading must be strategic, (d) skilled reading requires motivation, and (e) skilled reading is a life-long pursuit.

Reading instruction in America is a highly political, highly emotional issue. The problem does not seem to center on the skills to be taught to early readers. The political and emotional issue at stake is delivery systems and the effect these systems have on children.

In recent years the focus of the debate has centered on two approaches; the largely accepted basal reading program and the newer, holistic method of whole language instruction. Included in these approaches is the hotly debated issue of phonics instruction.

As Adams (1990) points out in the book Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning About Print, "Virtually every reading program teaches phonics

at some level" (p. 12). In Becoming a Nation of Readers: Implications for Teachers, Binkley (1986) reports, "The goal of phonics is not that children be able to state the rules governing letter sound relationships but to get across the alphabetic principle, the principle that there are systematic relationships between letters and sounds" (p. 7).

Juel (1990) states, "Unlike basal word learning, which Bass and Dreeken found to be only trivially related to individual aptitude, they (Bass and Dreeken) found phonics learning to show unique contributions to second grade reading comprehension" (p. 247). Obviously the question is not whether phonics should be taught. The question is how much phonics, when phonics, and how phonics should be taught.

It is estimated that 75% to 90% of reading programs in U.S. schools employ basal programs (Anderson, Hyiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985). Holland and Hall (1989) state that "Basal readers are the most universally available and often the only instructional materials used for teaching reading." They continue, "The basal approach is desirable to many educators because it can be taught and easily tested for recall" (p. 323).

Basal programs are designed as total reading packages. Newman and Church (1990) point out that "The basal's importance can be attributed to the fact that such series come as a package designed to address a wide range of reading related skills from diagnosis to decoding to literary appreciation" (p. 23).

Reutzel and Cotter (1990) note that the typical basal classroom includes elements of whole language philosophy but the classroom is very structured. Each lesson is developed from the basal series published scope and sequence chart of reading skills. The classroom is divided into one or

more learning centers where seat work was finished. However, after observing these basal classrooms for one school year, Reutzel and Cotter conclude that the goals of the reading instruction were "mastery of scope and sequence of skills and passing year end skills tests" (p. 254).

A typical lesson in the Ginn 720 series follows closely with Reutzel and Cotter's (1990) observations. The Ginn series follows a four-step process. The first step is preparation for reading which includes new sight words. Step two is reading and discussing the lesson including teacher questions and student-teacher interaction. Step three involves interrelated activities including the teacher presenting lessons in decoding, phonics, and comprehension. Worksheets and seatwork are usually included in this step. Step four is developing reading skills. This step can be independent reading, worksheets or other forms of seatwork.

McCallum (1988) points out the importance that basal series have in the typical classroom. McCallum believes that, "Basal systems provide a management system for coordinating reading instruction. A scope and sequence of skills to be introduced is provided and evaluation and diagnosis are facilitated via criterion referenced tests. The importance of this function cannot be overlooked" (p. 205). Additionally, McCallum sees basals as playing a critical role in reading instruction because he believes that they are responsive to research findings and pressures teachers face, have changed over time due to public pressure, and provide on the job training for reading teachers.

Researchers and whole language advocates point out that major problems exist in the basal approach. Traditionally, basal programs rely on grouping students according to ability. The use of ability groups can lead to

more challenging instruction for good readers but social stigmatation for poor readers (Winegard & Paris, 1989). Winegard and Paris believe that "inflexible use of ability groups teaches children that success in reading is not measured by information garnered or pleasure experienced, but by group membership" (p. 31). Students perform according to the groups they were placed in. Cazden (1981) found that children with the same reading scores performed like poor readers when assigned to low reading groups and more like good readers when assigned to high reading groups.

Basal texts and teacher manuals remain a problem within basal programs. Although research by Bacharach and Alexander (1986) suggest that it is not the text which fails but the inappropriate application of texts by teachers, Cassidy (1989) believes that five problem areas exist within basal texts. Cassidy believes that a problem exists in comprehension, where separate skills are reinforced; content and language, where basals exhibit stories that have less developed plots and are not told from varying points of view; the readability formula used eliminates key words that destroy key relationships; teacher manuals have little connection with stories; student manuals have poor directions and often were not related to the skills practiced. K. S. Goodman (1987) maintains that "Research has shown that page for page and line for line workbooks are harder to read than the stories in the basals because they involve less natural language" (p. 66).

Another problem that exists is the lack of variety of writing types found in basals. Flood and Lapp (1987) found that the content in eight basal programs studied were almost exclusively literary. Flood and Lapp maintain that claims of content breadth by basal publishers are unfounded. In two separate studies cited by Flood and Lapp (Durbin, 1981; Olsen & Dillner,

1976), selections in basals were found to be almost exclusively stories and poems.

An additional argument against basals is that the programs foster the idea that more attention is placed on covering materials than selecting important and suitable educational objectives (Dankin, 1990). Harste (1989) believes that "skills taught are for the most part hallucinated by basal authors for the purpose of sequencing lessons." Harste continues, "A skills model of reading does not reflect what readers naturally do or how they developed these abilities in the first place" (p. 265).

Testing these skills sequences is an additional problem.

K. S. Goodman (1987) believes that basals have become more arbitrarily sequential with more required testing. Winegard (1988) believes that because of basals, reading has become more mechanical than thoughtful. Winegard believes that teachers overemphasize skills and may fail to link these skills to literature or other curricular areas. Holland and Hall cite Mork (1982) when suggesting that the ratio of reading practice to reading instruction should be 80% to 20%. However Berglund (1983) sees the reverse actually taking place. Practice is usually in the form of workbook completion. Student progress is measured on the mastery of skills taught. Estes (1977) reported similar results. Students are tested on reading assessments and placed in different levels according to skills mastered rather than reading ability.

Basals are a systematic approach to reading education. Holland and Hall (1989) believe that "Proponents of the basal approach state that this approach offers a carefully and effectively sequenced program where prerequisite subskills are mastered before subsequent subskills are

introduced" (p. 323). The Commission on Reading: National Teachers of English (1989) state that no evidence exists that skills mastery will enable the student to understand connected text. Harste (1989) is stronger in condemning basals for approaching reading in such a structured manner. Harste states that "Basals assign a particular set of activities involving a limited range of thinking. They are as dangerous to the mental health and critical thinking abilities of teachers as they are to children" (p. 265).

Whole Language Approaches to Reading

Although the whole language approach is gaining increasing popularity, educators and researchers like Slavin (1989) warn against "the tendency in education toward faddism known as the swinging pendulum" (p. 783). Reutzel and Cotter (1990) maintain that little evidence exists that whole language approaches lead to comparable reading achievement when contrasted to traditional basal approaches. "One reason for the lack of comparative information regarding whole language strategies with other reading instructional approaches stem from a substantial resistance from whole language advocates toward traditional research design and instrumentation" (p. 252).

Although little traditional research has been done on whole language approaches, American educators are looking for alternatives to traditional reading instruction. In Becoming a Nation of Readers the Commission points to the fact that basal programs drive reading instruction. The report states that basal instruction strongly influences how reading is taught in American schools and what students read. Whole language advocates believe that the

whole language approach offers more than just an "add-on to present reading programs" (McCallum, 1988, p. 46).

Whole language is not a program although whole language packages can be purchased. Whole language is a philosophy that embodies within its teaching authenticity, risk taking, choice, and empowerment (Mcgee & Lomax, 1990). Holland and Hall (1989) list eight whole language characteristics: (a) no predetermined sequence of skills, (b) sight words are taught in context, (c) verbal communication is important, (d) student's vocabulary words appear on a chart, (e) freedom to learn is uncontrolled and unlimited--students begin with what they know, (f) students are not afraid of failure, (g) small groups are formed but not on the basis of ability, and (h) positive self concepts develop from success.

D. Goodman (1987) stresses that choice, ownership and power are major elements of the whole language process. Furthermore, the process of the whole language approach involves integration and not fragmentation of the reading process. It also acknowledges that the skill of the teacher and interaction between student teacher is critical.

Fragmentation of the reading process is a major concern of advocates of the whole language approach. In whole language, language is kept whole and it is integrated into the learning process. Gentry (1987) believes that the whole language approach promotes language development for the natural purpose of language-communicating meaning.

Communication and reading comprehension are primary goals of the whole language approach. It has been pointed out that basal approaches to reading focus on mastery of sets of sequenced skills and subskills. Harste (1989) says, "Reading comprehension is what readers do to make sense of

situations in which print is involved, rather than a set of skills taught in the name of reading comprehension" (p. 220).

To ensure that children read, whole language classrooms are found to be rich in print and print oriented activities (Reutzel & Cotter, 1990). It was also found that at risk children are the very ones who need to take the risks in the classroom. These children are the children who have had reading problems ". . . exacerbated by the fragmented, right answer, skills based literary instruction they have been receiving" (Newman & Church, 1990, p. 23). Carbo (1987) suggests that the belief that there is a set number of skills to be learned is a dangerous myth and may severely limit numbers of children. Whole language advocates insist that a lack of a skill does not indicate a need for the skill. Students may be able to perform higher level reading skills without performing lower level skills.

Some research does indicate that whole language classes are as effective or achieved better results than basal classes. Reutzel and Cotter (1990) found significant differences favoring whole language classes over basal classes in total reading scores as well as vocabulary and comprehension subtest scores. Slaughter, Haussler, Frank, Jilbert, and Silentman (1985) found that children who were taught whole language strategies then employed these strategies fared better on teacher-constructed tests than comparable basal students. Harste (1989) points out that in 157 studies, students in experimental programs scored more than two-thirds of a standard deviation higher than basal reading groups to which they were compared.

Problems can be pointed out in whole language classrooms. A common argument against whole language approaches is that the classroom

is irresponsible. The argument contends that code emphasis is essential to learning to read (Beginning to Read). Basal advocates contend that basal classrooms provide that the largest argument then is that whole language classes do not establish a sound base for word recognition or decoding words. The whole language approach maintains that, "Whole word recognition is more efficient than laboring over phonics analysis" (Vail, 1990, p. 23).

A final problem with the whole language approach is that teachers may view this program as a cure all for what ails their reading students. According to K. S. Goodman (1987), whole language is a philosophy and is more than a substitute for basal readers. Teachers must accept all or none of this philosophy. It must be taken as a whole. Newman and Church (1990) believe that ". . . traditional, one shot inservices may give teachers a few new ideas, but they leave teachers without the analytic tools to figure out where to go next and why" (p. 24).

Chapter 3

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Description of the Population

Albany Area Schools is located in rural central Minnesota. The district is comprised of 1,621 students who attend the district's public schools. Seven hundred sixty-one students populate the elementary schools in Grades 1 through 6. Elementary schools are located in the towns of Albany, Avon, and Farming. Additionally, 134 students attend the Holy Family Elementary School in Albany. The district is a growing district with some overcrowding in both the Avon and Albany elementary facilities.

The population of the district is predominantly white, German Catholic. Most people in the district are employed in Agri-Business related fields, however, there has been a shift to industrial and service related jobs in St. Cloud. Pockets of professional people reside in all communities although there is a larger population of white collar, professional people in Avon due to its proximity to St. Cloud, St. John's and St. Benedict's Universities and direct access to Interstate 94.

Two items should be noted here. In the years 1984 through 1987, 40 staff members serviced the needs of the areas elementary students. Included in this number were four Chapter 1 teachers and 6 1/2 Special Education

teachers. In an effort to reduce class size, the Board of Education began a program to hire new elementary teachers. As of the 1990-91 school year, 52 instructors taught area elementary students. This figure included nine Chapter 1 teachers and seven Special Education teachers. Although services to district children have increased, class sizes were not dramatically reduced due to a decided increase in the district's student population.

The second item to be noted is that the Albany school district has a significant population that receives Chapter 1 services. One hundred forty-two students or 35.2% of the student population receive assistance in Albany elementary, 56 or 38.3% of the population receive aid in Farming elementary, and 81 or 23.2% of the population receive aid in Avon elementary. Chapter 1 monetary assistance to the district is determined by the number of students who apply for and are granted free or reduced lunch. However, services provided are based upon objective criteria including results from the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and classroom performance.

Limitations

There were three limitations of note to consider as this study progressed. First, the Ginn group of students numbered 89 in 1984, 76 in 1985, and 86 in 1986. This figure is contrasted with the Total Reading group that numbered 109 students in 1988, 113 students in 1989, and 112 students in 1990. According to John Roscoe (personal communication, May 27, 1991) the increase in population from 1986 to 1990 represent a disproportionate amount of at-risk students. The strong possibility exists that a good portion of these students were poor readers. This fact is further

evidenced by the large increase in Chapter teachers and aides working with the Chapter 1 program during this time.

Also, students may drift in and out of this study because of transfers and relocations. The only criteria established for inclusion in this study is that they had to take the Iowa Test of Basic Skills in their previous school during the years that this study investigated.

The second limitation is that both groups experienced different sets of norms. The Ginn group of students were tested using 1982 norms while the Total Reading group was tested using 1985 norms. Norms changed because performance by students changed nationwide. Hoover, Director of the ITBS program and Senior Author of ITBS, maintains that although a change in norms would be significant for higher elementary grades, changes in norms are relatively small for lower elementary grades. Although the norm changes are not statistically significant for the groups tested and studied, the point should be noted (S. Hoover, personal communication, July 17, 1991).

The third limitation is that in 1987 the level of tests were changed from Level 6, a test usually given to first graders in mid-year, to Level 7, a test given to first graders in the spring of the year. All Albany area students are tested in the spring of the year. Obviously, Level 6 is an easier test than Level 7. Again, according to Hoover, Level 7 tests reflect more accurately for students at the top, while Level 6 tests would allow for a better showing for students who would ordinarily be found in the bottom quartile. Hoover believes that a difference in test levels could reflect a 2-3% difference in student percentiles as they were placed in quartiles. In other words, students taking Level 7 tests would find a larger percentage on or near the bottom with a more accurate measurement of the top quartile.

Results

It was found that after taking into consideration the varying degree of difficulty in the level of the tests taken, Total Reading did not provide significant positive change in Albany area elementary students percentile rankings when compared with national percentiles. In 1984, out of 89 students taking the ITBS, eight students or 9% of the population placed in the bottom quartile, 21 students or 24% of the population placed in the second quartile, 25 or 28% of the population placed in the third quartile, and 34 or 38% of the population placed in the upper quartile (Figure 1). In 1985 there was a noticeable shift from the bottom and top quartile to the third quartile. Two students or 3.0% of 76 students placed in the bottom, 17 students or 22% placed in the second quartile, 36 or 47% placed in the third quartile, while 21 students or 28% of the population placed in the top quartile (Figure 2). In 1986, 86 students took the ITBS. Eight students or 9% of the population placed in the bottom quartile, 18 or 21% of the students placed in the second, 26 or 30% placed in the third, and 34 or 40% placed in the top quartile (Figure 3).

Total Reading was implemented in the district following the 1986 school year. By 1988 all of the primary grades were taught reading through the Total Reading program. In 1988, 109 first graders took the ITBS. Fifteen students or 14% of the population placed in the lower quartile, 29 or 27% placed in the second, 29 or 27% placed in the third, and 35 or 32% placed in the upper quartile (Figure 1). In 1989 scores improved in the middle quartiles with a marked decrease in the upper quartile. One hundred thirteen students took the ITBS in 1989. Seventeen or 15% placed in the bottom, 37 or 33% placed in the second, 34 or 30% placed in the third, while 25 or 22% placed

in the top (Figure 2). In 1990, 19 students or 16% of the students placed in the bottom, 27 or 24% placed in the second, 38 or 33 % placed in the third, and 38 or 33 % placed in the top quartile (Figure 3).

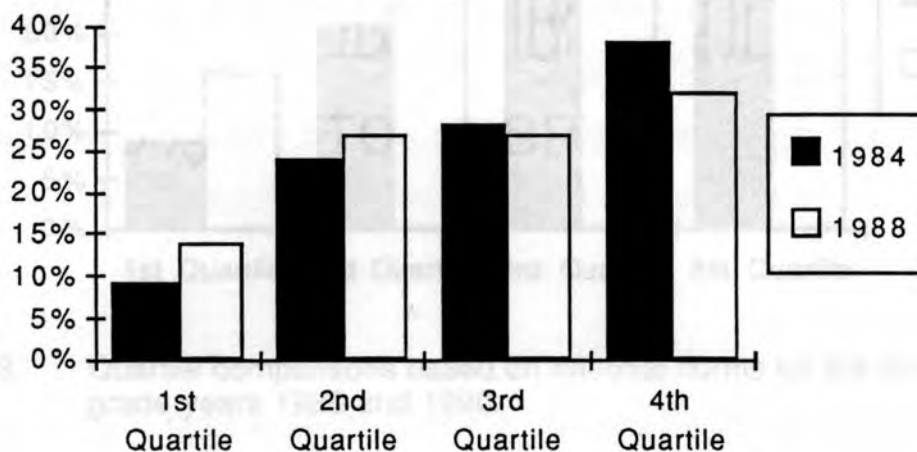


Figure 1. Quartile comparisons based on national norms for first grade years 1984 and 1988.

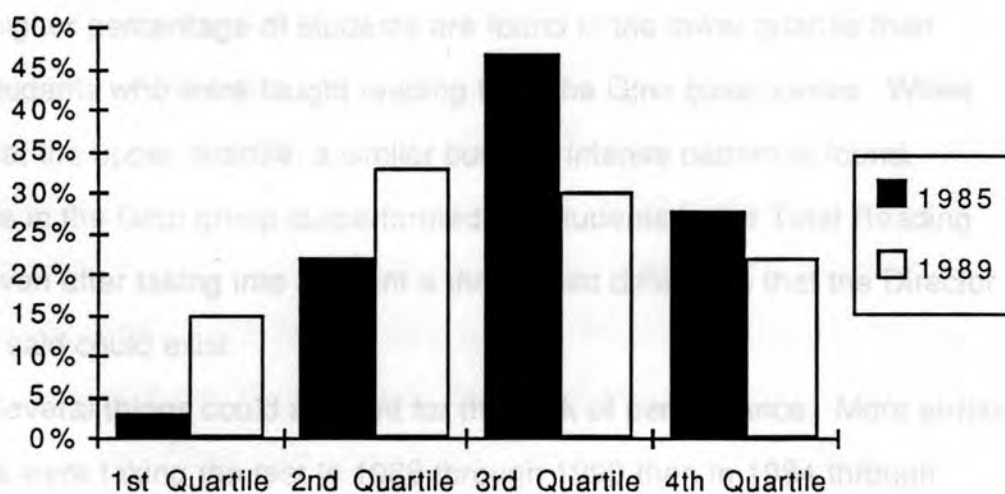


Figure 2. Quartile comparisons based on national norms for the second grade years 1985 and 1989.

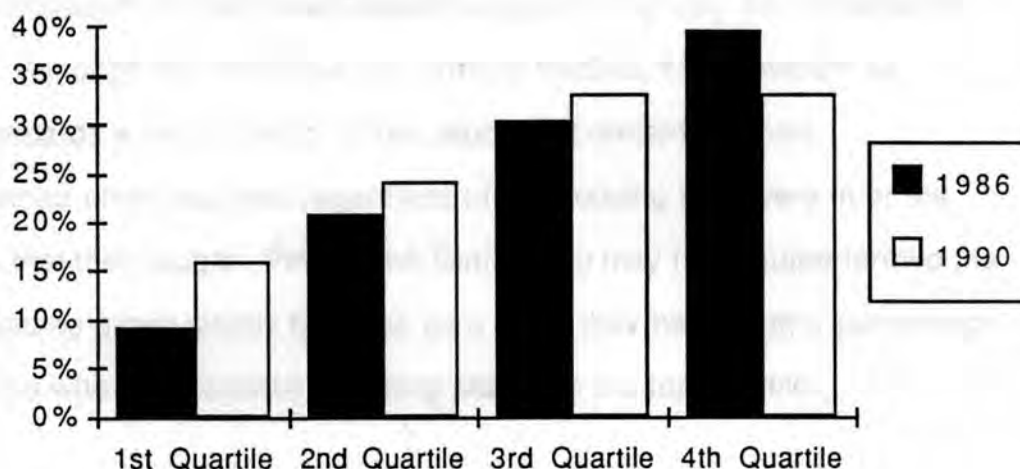


Figure 3. Quartile comparisons based on national norms for the third grade years 1986 and 1990.

Reading percentiles have not dramatically improved since Total Reading was introduced in 1987. Even taking into consideration a 3% differential in percentages due to the Total Reading group taking a harder test, a higher percentage of students are found in the lower quartile than those students who were taught reading from the Ginn basal series. When looking at the upper quartile, a similar but less intense pattern is found. Students in the Ginn group outperformed the students in the Total Reading group even after taking into account a three-point difference that the Director of ITBS said could exist.

Several things could account for this lack of performance. More at-risk students were taking the test in 1988 through 1990 than in 1984 through 1986. This is evidenced by the increased number of Chapter 1 teachers working in the district as well as the large numbers of people throughout the elementary schools who receive Chapter 1 help. Also, changing norms and changing test levels have a significant impact on the percentages studied.

Enthusiasm for the Total Reading program may vary from teacher to teacher. Although this area was not formally studied, it was evident as student records were recorded for this study that certain teachers outperformed other teachers regardless of the building they were in or the students that they taught. Finally, the Ginn group may have outperformed the Total Reading group simply because as a class they had a larger percentage of students who were capable of being placed in the top quartile.

Discussion

One cannot conclude from this study that Total Reading is not a significant positive force in teaching Albany students reading and communication skills. This study only looked at comparable reading percentages placed into quartiles and did not compare listening skills, usage or writing skills. Further, one cannot conclude that either the Ginn basal series or Total Reading offers a better language program and is more effective in its methodology.

Total Reading has had a strong and positive influence on the Reading/Language Arts curriculum. Due in part to the whole language approach used in Total Reading, avenues of communication with parents have been opened up that did not exist before. Parents apparently believe they are partners in the reading effort. Strong PTAs have grown in both Albany and Avon. Other parent/teacher/student support groups have developed roots in the district. Teachers are also excited with the flexibility that Total Reading offers. The Administration continues to foster experimentation and renewal by offering yearly in-service to its staff.

Chapter 4

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Further study should be conducted to determine the effectiveness of Total Reading. Any further study should include a review of the listening, writing and usage components of the ITBS results. Further study should focus on several years following the implementation of Total Reading. It is quite possible that as years go by teachers will become more comfortable with the process and significant positive results would be noticed.

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