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Students' and Teacher Perceptions on the "Really Great Reading" Phonics Program and Its Effectiveness

Savanna Simmons
sns16a@acu.edu

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Recommended Citation

Simmons, Savanna, "Students' and Teacher Perceptions on the "Really Great Reading" Phonics Program and Its Effectiveness" (2021). *Masters of Education in Teaching and Learning*. 41.
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Students' and Teacher Perceptions on the "Really Great Reading" Phonics Program and Its

Effectiveness

Savanna Simmons

Abilene Christian University

Abstract

Choosing a phonics instructional approach to use in the classroom can be a difficult task for teachers, which is why many schools have started implementing specific phonics programs. The purpose of this study was to determine the student and teacher perceptions of the “Really Great Reading” phonics program and its effectiveness for helping students learn to read and spell. The study took place in a second-grade classroom with twenty in-person students and the classroom teacher. The researcher gathered data from surveys, interviews, and pre- and post-assessments. Qualitative data was analyzed using the constant comparative method and quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Four major themes emerged including the program being systematic, the need for differentiation, student progress, and foundational phonics skills lessons. The study may be helpful for teachers and educators that want to gain more insight about the program.

Students' and Teacher Perceptions on the "Really Great Reading" Phonics Program and Its Effectiveness

"What it should really be about is are they mastering the phonics skill? Are they able to read and decode the skill more than spell it?" These were just a few questions asked by the classroom teacher that participated in this study. The following is a portion of a poetic transcription (Glesne, 1997) created from an interview with the classroom teacher. After interviewing Mrs. Green (all names are pseudonyms), I could tell differentiation would be one of the themes prevalent to this study.

I feel like it's definitely effective with our average readers.

I feel like the kids are making a lot of connections.

I don't know how great of a program it is for our GT kids.

A lot of the phonics skills they already know, so...

How can I differentiate this more, so they're still engaged?

Really Great Reading (RGR) is a phonics program that focuses on remediating and preventing decoding weakness along with providing teachers with the tools and knowledge necessary for phonics instruction; their approach is structured, explicit, multisensory, and interactive (www.reallygreatreading.com).

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine what happens in a second grade classroom when the RGR phonics program is implemented. In 2020, Clark Elementary School implemented RGR in all its second-grade classrooms. Since this was a new program, I was interested in understanding students' and teacher perceptions to determine their feelings toward the program and its effectiveness. Additionally, I wanted to learn if students' phonics skills have improved by using the program. This study addressed the following research questions:

Research Question: What happens when the RGR phonics program is implemented in a second grade classroom?

Sub Question 1: What are student perceptions of the RGR phonics program and its effectiveness?

Sub Question 2: What are teacher perceptions of the RGR phonics program and its effectiveness?

Sub Question 3: Do student phonics skills increase or improve using this program?

When this study was conducted, I was a graduate student completing a year-long clinical teaching placement in a second-grade classroom at Clark Elementary. Clark Elementary is a Title I school located in West Texas in Grey ISD. The school served approximately 536 students in kindergarten through fifth-grade, and 407 of those students were identified as economically disadvantaged. The student body consisted of the following ethnicities: 12.7% African American, 42.4% Hispanic, 39.7% White, 4.5% two or more races, 0.6% American Indian, and 0.2% Asian. For this study, only one classroom was used for selecting participants.

Literature Review

There are many ways to approach teaching phonics. Oftentimes, teachers may be given or required to use a certain phonics program or curriculum by their school or district. Other times, teachers may have the choice as to how they want to approach their phonics instruction and what they view as the best approach. In a study conducted by McGeown (2015), synthetic phonics instruction was compared to a more eclectic approach and found that different phonics instructional approaches yielded different skills children would rely on and use when reading. Synthetic phonics instruction was used in a study by Bradley and Noell (2018) along with a constant time delay, which is a strategy that uses prompt fading to establish response control, to

establish phonics decoding skills; the researchers found that students made gains in letter sounds and letter blending when reading. In another study, Skibbe, Gerde, Wright, and Samples-Steele (2016) discussed what phonics strategies and curriculum are taught in a head start program, and what supports teachers are provided to individualize phonics instruction to meet the needs of all learners; these researchers found that there was little consistency or similarities between the different programs and curriculums, so students were taught different skills. Bowers (2020) found that systematic phonics instruction was no more effective than alternative phonics instruction.

Educators across the nation are tasked with selecting phonics programs for their schools or classrooms. The things educators should be looking for in a phonics program according to Blevins (2020) are a well-defined scope and sequence, blending, diction, word awareness, and high frequency words. Before a teacher can teach phonics, he or she needs to know and understand all the components of phonics. Teachers that had little knowledge about phonics skills or instruction participated in a year-long mentoring program, and after completion of the program, researchers found that mentoring was effective for teachers because their proficiency in phonics instruction increased, which can be shown in the gains students made in phonics skills over the course of the year (Ehri & Flugman, 2018).

There has been little research done on RGR, both on perceptions and the effectiveness of the program. In one unpublished study that can be found on their website, SEG Measurement (2015), an independent research firm, gave third grade students a pre- and post-assessment to determine the effectiveness of RGR; they found that students showed gains in reading skills, accuracy, and fluency after RGR was implemented. Additionally, on the RGR website, a list of unpublished third party sources have all found that the program shows substantial reading

growth, gains in overall reading and phonics skills, and improved reading scores (www.reallygreatreading.com).

There are few studies that have researched perceptions of phonics, phonics instruction, phonics programs, or phonics curriculum; however, there are studies that have looked at the students' perceptions of reading. In a study conducted by Cobb (2012), the researcher studied children, ages kindergarten to sixth grade and their perceptions of what makes a "good reader." The findings of this study concluded that younger children viewed adults and friends as good readers, whereas older children viewed themselves as good readers; in addition to this, children believed that good readers enjoy reading. In another study conducted by Kendrick and McKay (2004), the researchers were interested in first-grade and second-grade students' perceptions of reading and writing both inside and outside of school; their findings included when and where students read and write, whom they read and write with, emotional ties associated with reading and writing, and how and why reading and writing is important for their futures.

Although there is a significant amount of research on phonics, few studies have examined the RGR phonics program, especially the perceptions of the program. My study will provide a unique perspective to the literature on phonics that can fill in the gaps on what is missing in the existing literature.

Methods

This action research study was conducted in a second-grade classroom at Clark Elementary during my year-long clinical teaching placement. I studied what happens in a second-grade classroom when RGR is implemented, and more specifically students' and teacher perceptions of the program and its effectiveness. The following sections describe what I did during this action research study. Since this study took place during the spring semester of my

year-long clinical teaching placement, I had built relationships with the students and classroom teacher, so they were comfortable with me as a teacher and researcher.

Participant Selection

The participants in this study included a single classroom of second grade students and one classroom teacher from a Texas school. I sent home a parent information letter and consent form, and the students were asked to sign an assent form. Of the twenty in-person students and one virtual student, all twenty in-person students received parent permission, assented to the study, and participated; the one virtual student did not give parent permission or assent to participate in the study. Each student that consented completed a survey. Six students were chosen to be interviewed based on the results of the survey. Additionally, the classroom teacher was interviewed after consenting to participate in the study. My class consisted of 10 girls and 11 boys. Thirteen of the students were Caucasian, two were Hispanic, and six were mixed race. The classroom teacher was a Caucasian female.

Data Collection

All student participants were given a RGR attitude survey. The survey consisted of ten questions that pertained to the perceptions of the program (see Appendix A and Appendix B). There was a combination of closed and open-ended questions, with eight being closed-ended and two being open-ended. Students responded to the closed-ended questions using a Likert scale consisting of emojis.

I chose a sample of students to interview based on their responses to the RGR attitude survey. I used purposive sampling (Patton, 2002) to select two students who indicated they had a positive outlook on the program, two students who indicated they had a neutral outlook on the

program, and two students who indicated they had a negative outlook on the program. The sample represented the demographic makeup of my class. The interviews were conducted through one-on-one interviews. Each individual interview with each of the six students lasted approximately ten minutes. I also conducted one interview with my cooperating teacher that lasted approximately 30 minutes. The interviews were semi-structured (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015), with pre-planned open-ended questions. Additional questions were asked depending on the responses of the participants. All of the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

Furthermore, each student completed the Informal Phonics Inventory (McKenna & Stahl, 2015) once during the fall semester to gain information about students' phonics skills for teaching purposes. The Informal Phonics Inventory (McKenna & Stahl, 2015) was given to students again at the end of the study to determine if students have grown in their phonics knowledge and skills (see Appendix C).

Data Analysis

Qualitative data was analyzed using the constant comparative method, with initial coding followed by creating hierarchies of categories and supporting codes (Hubbard & Power, 2003). The themes that emerged from the coding of the data determined what additional data needed to be collected. The quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics by charting the students' survey scores on a bar graph (Hendricks, 2017). The students' pre-assessment scores, post-assessment scores, and change in their pre- and post- scores from the Informal Phonics Inventory were charted using a table to display data findings. Afterwards, this data was converted into percentages in order to display overall changes in students' scores.

I began analyzing the qualitative data by manually coding the first 20% of the data. Through this process, I was able to create a list of 15-20 level 1 codes which focused on basic

activities that were found in the data. I used those level 1 codes to code the remaining 80% of the qualitative data (Tracy, 2013). The next step in the coding process was to develop 3-5 level 2 codes that represented the major themes of this study; afterwards, I indexed the codes by gathering all the supporting data for each level 2 code. Then, I wrote analytic memos, one for each of the level 2 codes that I used to help me better understand the data. Finally, I created a codebook (see Appendix D), which included a list of codes, definitions, and examples (Tracy, 2013).

Findings

Based on the data that was collected and analyzed, the following four major themes emerged: the program is a systematic phonics program, the need for differentiation for more engagement, students have made progress, and the program follows units and lessons in foundational skills. These themes were developed after student and teacher interviews, student survey and pre- and post-assessments. In the sections that follow, I will present the major themes, in the form of poetic transcriptions, through the lenses of the six students and the classroom teacher that were interviewed: Rose, Tony, Jade, Caleb, Derek, Julia, and Mrs. Green. A poetic transcription (Glesne, 1997) is a poem composed of conversation taken from each interview. Each transcription was created using the words participants said in their interview. After each interview was transcribed, I took conversation from each interview to write the poem. The qualitative data of each participant will be presented first, followed by an in-depth description and analysis of the findings. Each transcription represents the perceptions and voice of the participant, and if any questions that I asked participants during interviews are included in the transcription, they will be differentiated through italics. I will conclude the findings by discussing analyzed data from the pre- and post- Informal Phonics Inventory scores.

Mrs. Green

It's systematic in the way the plans fall each day.
I feel like it's pretty hands on,
and a lot of working together.

One thing I wish it did have was more games,
and more practice with partners,
because it's a lot of whole group instruction.
I would like for them to have more practice with a partner,
and not so much WHOLE GROUP instruction.

I feel like it's definitely effective with our average readers.
I feel like the kids are making a lot of connections.
I don't know how great of a program it is for our GT kids.
A lot of the phonics skills they already know, so...
How can I differentiate this more, so they're still engaged?
I feel like our lower and average kids have improved in their reading.
They're focusing on how to decode words.

One thing I would change next year is doing a more small group setting...
because there is a lot of whole group
where there are videos and,
coming up to the board to sort words.
The best thing about the program is how the kids are RETAINING
the information a lot better.

On the weekend, I'll look over the lessons and choose what I think
would be IMPORTANT to cover.
Those lessons are SO LONG; there's just NOT ENOUGH time
to cover it all.

I definitely feel like the syllabards are helpful,
and they help the kids to read the words ON THEIR OWN.
So, I feel like the tiles are good for all levels; they are BENEFICIAL to them.

During her interview, Mrs. Green discussed all four themes that I found in the data.

Based on the interview, I was able to tell that Mrs. Green overall sees that the program has many great benefits and uses strategies that are effective for students; however, if there was one thing that Mrs. Green could change about the program it would be less whole group instruction and more time for small groups and partner work. This would be an example of wanting more

differentiation for more student engagement. A few times throughout the interview, she mentioned how the lessons are mostly whole group, and at times the lessons included too much information or whole group activities to do that cannot be fit into the time that is allotted for phonics instruction. She described how she takes time each week to look over the lessons and choose what she believes is most important to teach; this falls into the theme of the program following units and lessons in foundational skills because she had to choose which lessons were taught each week. Many times there would be too many lessons or too long of lessons that not all of them could be taught during the school week. This way she can ensure that her lessons would not take too long, and the students would not become disengaged.

Another aspect Mrs. Green would like to see changed about the program that ties into having less whole group instruction is having time for more partner work or small group instruction, which falls into the theme of the program being systematic. The program did follow a certain routine and system each week, but another way in which it was systematic was that it followed a certain scope and sequence. The program taught basic skills such as vowel sounds and consonant blends at the beginning, and as the year went on, it taught more advanced foundational skills such as prefixes, suffixes, and correct spelling for different plural objects. It's important that students understand more basic skills before they are able to understand advanced skills. Since the program does follow a scope and sequence, students that are struggling or mastering the skills need the opportunity to work in small groups or in partners to continue practicing the skill or to further enrich their learning. She felt like if she were able to have these two things, she could provide more opportunities for differentiation for all students, no matter what their reading level was, and it would give the students the opportunity to participate in activities that would be engaging and challenging for them. In the future, she would like to find a

way to include these, so that all the students are getting their needs met during phonics instruction, and they do not become bored with the lesson.

In terms of effectiveness, Mrs. Green believed the program was effective for both struggling and average readers, but not as effective for gifted and talented (GT) students because of the lack of differentiation or challenge the program provides during whole group instruction. This is why she believed the program would be more effective and beneficial to all students if she were able to provide small group instruction for teaching different phonics skills.

Mrs. Green felt as though all the strategies that the program uses to teach phonics skills (syllaboards, videos, clapping, finger stretching, assessments, word sorts, and letter tiles) are all beneficial to students because they provide various modalities to learning and understanding the skill; this belongs to the theme of students making progress. Therefore, she has seen the students be able to make connections to what they are learning. Oftentimes students would come to Mrs. Green or me and point out a new or old phonics skill that we had learned. Many times, students would see a phonics rule in a book they were reading or on an anchor chart. Overall, Mrs. Green liked the program and saw benefits from using it, but there were still some things that she thought could be improved upon to make it even better.

Rose

Tell me about using letter tiles.

I mean I love doing it,
but sometimes we do it a lot,
like most of the time.
So, it gets like
 kind of exhausting.
Like you have to write some of the words you've already learned.

Tell me about using syllaboards.

I love the syllaboards,
but it's like we have to do it over
 and over

and over
and over again.

Tell me about finger stretching and clapping out syllables.

I like [it] since we sound out words.

We can actually like clap it out.

So, it kinda makes me
happy.

Rose's interview mainly discussed the topic of needing more differentiation for engagement. Often times, she would become tired or bored with doing the same things over and over. Rose was an interesting student to interview because she was a student that I indicated as having a negative outlook on the program based on her survey answers; however, when I began to interview her, she had mostly positive things to say about the program. From her interview, she associated negative feelings with having to do things over again or learning about things she already knew, but she associated positive feelings with the things she enjoyed the most or that she believed helped her most understand a new phonics skill.

Some of the differentiation strategies that the program uses are finger stretching, which is similar to sounding out words, using magnetic letter tiles to help students spell words, and sorting words on the board based on the phonics skill that is being learned that week. It is evident that Rose enjoys clapping out words, so she can hear the syllables broken apart and the movement of clapping to help break apart syllables is something that is beneficial for Rose and other students in the class.

Syllaboards are small rectangular shaped white boards, about the size of a smart phone that are used in almost every phonics lesson. These syllaboards are used to help students visually see the separation of syllables and help them determine where exactly in the word the syllable is broken apart. Using the syllaboards is something that Rose made clear she didn't enjoy doing because it is something that she feels she uses over and over again.

The letter tiles are magnetic tiles that students use to create words. Each square tile has one letter of the alphabet, and there are even tiles that have more than one letter on them; some include vowel teams, diphthongs, r-controlled vowels, etc. Based on the phonics skill that is being taught and learned that week, students get into pairs to share the letter tiles and then they practice making words to practice the phonics skill. Rose states that she loves doing the letter tiles, but she also feels exhausted when we used them.

Tony

Tell me about when we use letter tiles.

This is partner work.

Most of the time, I get put up with Derek.

I like getting teamed up with him.

Sometimes I get teamed up with Evan,
which is even better.

Do you think it helps you when we use letter tiles?

Well, not really.

I already know all the words you're telling me!

Tell me about using syllaboards.

Well, it's basically just a waste of school time.

Just think of it this way: we're just putting down some white board,
and drawing words on it. It doesn't really do anything.

Is there anything we do in phonics that makes learning more enjoyable?

Well, I don't know really,

but it's just

kind of like a chore, basically.

If we only answered questions in phonics, it'd be a lot better for me.

Most people like doing papers for some reason,

but it's I DON'T.

I ONLY want to ANSWER questions.

Tony was also a participant that mainly discussed the theme of needing more differentiation. He was a student that did not like anything about the program. Tony was a student that qualified for the gifted and talented program when he was in first grade, and he continued to be in the program in second grade. He was already an excellent reader and could

read above grade level. Reading was something that Tony enjoyed very much; you could often find him trying to read a book during a lesson instead of paying attention to the lesson.

The letter tiles is a strategy that is used in partners; this is how RGR has set up the program. In our class, it was crucial that we carefully choose partners for our students because some simply got along together better than others. Tony was a student that had to have his partner carefully chosen, which was usually someone like Evan or Derek whom Tony liked, and he wouldn't try to pester them, like Tony did try to do with many other students. Although this was an activity that is used in partners, Tony still felt as though he could do without the letter tiles because he already knew many words.

Tony was a student that I found to have a negative perception of the program and its strategies, which was made clear from his interview. Unlike Rose, Tony didn't seem to have a problem with doing things over and over again with syllabards; he felt as though the whole thing was a waste of school time. Tony was the type of student where it was especially important that he understood the reasoning and the importance of learning something before he actually did it. Additionally, he felt as though there was nothing about the phonics program that was enjoyable. In the interview from Mrs. Green, she indicated that she wishes there were more time for small groups or more ways she could have differentiated the learning and the lessons. The opportunity for more differentiation for students like Tony that didn't benefit as much from the regular lessons could potentially change his mind or viewpoint about phonics learning. For example, one component of RGR is an oral reading in which students read a passage out loud that goes along with a certain phonics skill, then they answer questions on the passage. An activity like this would be something that Tony would most likely enjoy, at least more than the

phonics instruction that was being used, and it could help make the learning more engaging and meaningful for students that need more differentiation.

Jade

What are your feelings when you use letter tiles to spell words?

Well, my feelings are like I'm learning something new.

Tell me about finger stretching and clapping syllables.

I like it because when we finger stretch,
it feels like you're...

instead of learning how it's spelled,
you can learn how it sounds with your mouth.

Do phonics lessons help you?

Well, I feel like when we do them,
we do something that I know,
it's good memory for me,
refreshens my mind.

What makes it most enjoyable?

The tiles because they're like magnetic.
The syllabboards, you get to use your dry erase marker.

Why is it important to learn new spelling rules?

If you don't, nobody would know what you are trying to say,
or what you were trying to write.
If you were having a big reading test,
you would have failed because you didn't learn them.
If you didn't know the sounds and the words
you wouldn't know what they are saying,
or the characters were saying,
or the narrator.

What about when we do the page at the end of the week?

I feel like it's fun 'cause you get to read a category,
or like some lists of words,
and it's like new words that you can learn.

Jade had much to say about the phonics program. From the survey, I placed Jade in the positive category because she described that there wasn't anything that she didn't like about the program. Jade was also a student that was in the gifted and talented program, and she also qualified when she was in first grade, like Tony. Although she was already an excellent reader,

and she could read books above grade level, she was a participant that had a more positive attitude and perception towards RGR.

Overall, Jade's perception was that no matter what the lesson was or what strategies we used, she was still able to learn something new. Although Jade was a student that already knew how to read well, we were still able to discuss how she had made progress using the program. When it came to the strategy of finger stretching and clapping syllables, Jade enjoyed those because she was able to hear how they sound before learning how it is spelled. As mentioned before, Jade was able to read above grade level, so many skills and words that were taught were things that Jade already knew. Even though she already knew them, she didn't let that get in the way of her learning. In the poetic transcription, Jade explained that even if she already knew something, she used that time to help her review the skill, and it helped to refresh her mind if there was a skill she hadn't practiced in a while.

Like many students described in the survey, the letter tiles and syllabards were two of the favorite things students enjoyed using during phonics. The letter tiles made the learning engaging because they were magnetic; therefore, it made learning more fun. Additionally, the syllabards were perceived as fun by many students because they were able to use small white boards and write with a dry erase marker, which was something that many students enjoyed, and using dry erase markers was something we didn't do often other than during phonics lessons.

Something that had not been discussed in previous transcriptions is the importance of learning phonics. Jade was able to list many reasons including knowing the sounds of words, knowing what books, characters, and narrators were saying, and not failing a test. This encompassed what a student's reasons for knowing phonics was, which is different from a

teacher's reasons. They were important for Jade to be able to read books, knowing the sounds of words, and so she didn't fail a test.

At the end of each week, Mrs. Green would make copies of one of the workbook pages that could be found at the end of the teacher phonics lesson books that correspond with the lesson for that week. This gave students the opportunity to see words that used that phonics skill. We practiced breaking apart the word into syllables, underlined the vowels, and noticed the phonics rule that could be found in each word. Afterwards, we practiced saying the words together and later in the day when it was time for stations, either Mrs. Green or I would pull one student at a time to read the words to us, which was used for their phonics grade. Most students, including Jade enjoyed doing this because they were able to show what they know, and they were able to learn new words. On the other hand, many students didn't like doing this or felt nervous because they didn't want to say any words incorrectly.

Caleb

I like it when we go and have turns doing the colors,
and all the letters;
I love that; yeah I love that.
I love that, too.
Yeah. Clapping, it's fun.
I love that, too. Yeah
Well,
I love that we get to move our fingers.

What is your favorite thing we do?
Syllabboards, because I love writing,
but I dislike when we have to do like long words.
I learn new things every day.
Well, I do love phonics...
because it's fun,
because we get to write and all kinds of stuff.
Yeah, with markers.

Even before interviewing Caleb, I knew he would have a positive outlook on the program and using its strategies. After the interview, it was evident that Caleb really loved phonics and learning new things. His interview mostly described the theme of making progress in both his reading and writing skills. Based on his interview and the survey each student completed, I was able to tell that Caleb just about loved everything to do with phonics. This included doing all the strategies that RGR implemented when using the program.

I could tell that Caleb especially loved doing syllaboards, clapping, and finger stretching to help him learn new phonics rules. He enjoyed the movements that clapping and finger stretching had to offer because he was able to learn more effectively using a kinesthetic modality.

Another aspect that Caleb really enjoyed about RGR was using the syllaboards. Not only did he love getting to use the marker when writing words on the syllaboards, but they were able to help him visually see where words were broken apart into syllables.

Many of the questions I asked him, he answered with some variation of “I love that.” He also enjoyed using the magnetic color tiles that students used to spell words; Caleb liked it when he was able to work with a partner to spell out the words; however, this activity became difficult for some students when the volume levels got a little high in the classroom. This was something that Caleb indicated during our interview, but overall, based on the data collection, it’s apparent that Caleb loved everything about learning phonics.

Derek

You don’t have to write;

you just gotta find it.

Plus, it’s kinda fun doing it.

To me, it’s more fun if we have partners.

It’s a lot easier to spell if you do it.

Then you can see if it needs to be the schwa sound, all that stuff.

I'd rather clap, but the finger stretching is pretty good, too.

I've learned so much about vowel stuff this year.

I've also learned some new words, too.

I've seen them a lot in like books.

The easy stuff I can easily get done,
but challenging stuff is a lot more fun for me.

You might need to use some of these,
cause, they might ask you what sound does it make,
and if you don't do it in second grade,
you won't be able to know how to do it in third grade.

What about going up to the board and sorting?

I think that really helps me,
because some of them are REALLY HARD.
Even if you do it slowly...
it's still a little confusing.

Are the pages at the end of the week helpful?

Yes, because it's mostly words you already did in the lesson,
but you might come across new things.
So, you know how to spell it and so you
actually KNOW how to PRONOUNCE it.

Derek mostly had a neutral stance on RGR. There were an equal amount of things he liked and disliked about the program. First, Derek told me about using the letter tiles, and for him, he enjoyed those because he didn't have to write anything; rather, he enjoyed building words and seeing them in a different way. Additionally, he liked being able to work with a partner to create different words based on the spelling rule we were learning for the week.

There were many times when Derek indicated that doing a certain activity or strategy was fun, for example, using the letter tiles, or doing something where he was able to be challenged. Derek was another student that was identified as GT, so he especially became more excited or engaged when we did something that was more challenging like sorting words by coming up to the board and moving words to the correct category. Therefore, during his interview, Derek

mostly discussed how doing different strategies and more challenging things helps him, which falls into the theme of differentiation.

A few things Derek didn't like were finger stretching and clapping out syllables. He indicated that he would rather clap, but finger stretching was good, too. I believe that if he had to choose, he would choose neither because those strategies weren't as helpful to him as other ones.

I thought it was interesting how he mentioned it's important to learn spelling rules because they might ask you those things in third grade. Derek and other students that were interviewed agreed that in third grade you might need to know those spelling rules if a teacher asks you or if they show up on a test. When asked though, many students said that learning phonics rules was important to be able to read or pronounce words or to be able to spell them correctly.

Julia

It's kinda fun, but...

we're always talking.

With the syllaboard, it's kinda fun because it's a little quieter,
and I can draw with my eraser.

It actually kind of makes me happy,
because when you clap it out, it helps you like,
reveal the real word.

Finger stretching is kind of fun, cause I can stretch my fingers,
like spread apart.

The page is actually really fun because I like reviewing the words.
It helps when we read the words to Mrs. Green and you.

Going up to the board to sort words is like a new refresher.
I don't like the videos that much because it's like
sometimes I don't really get what the video is saying.

During her interview, Julia was able to tell me things that fell into the themes of making progress and needing more differentiation. Although Julia was a student that I identified as

having a neutral outlook on the program, many of her responses during our interview had to do with things being fun. The letter tiles, finger stretching, and doing our phonics assessment at the end of the week were all examples of things that Julia thought were fun. Using the syllaboards were also a strategy that gave her feelings of happiness because you were able to “reveal the real word.” What she means by this was breaking apart the syllables to visually see the word in its parts.

Going up to the board to sort words and doing our phonics assessment at the end of the week were both things Julia enjoyed doing because she was able to review and refresh her mind with the phonics rule we had been learning that week. Oftentimes, the word sorts or assessments would include phonics rules that we have learned previously, so this gave the students the opportunity to review those skills.

One aspect of RGR that Julia did not like were the videos that were played at the beginning of each lesson. At times, the videos could be long and be packed full of so much information that it could seem overwhelming or confusing to students. This proved to be true for Julia because oftentimes she didn't understand what the videos were saying.

Assessment Scores

The theme of students making progress can also be seen in students' pre- and post-assessment scores. The Informal Phonics Inventory assess phonics skills ranging from consonant sounds, consonant blends, digraphs, diphthongs, the rule of silent e, and r-controlled vowels. The highest score an individual can receive is a 93. There are nine sections to the assessment, and each section ranges from earning 4-20 points depending on how many words or sounds are read. For example, if one section had twenty words, and all the words were read correctly, the student

would receive all twenty points for that section. Each word that a student says incorrectly takes one point away, and each word said correctly earns one point.

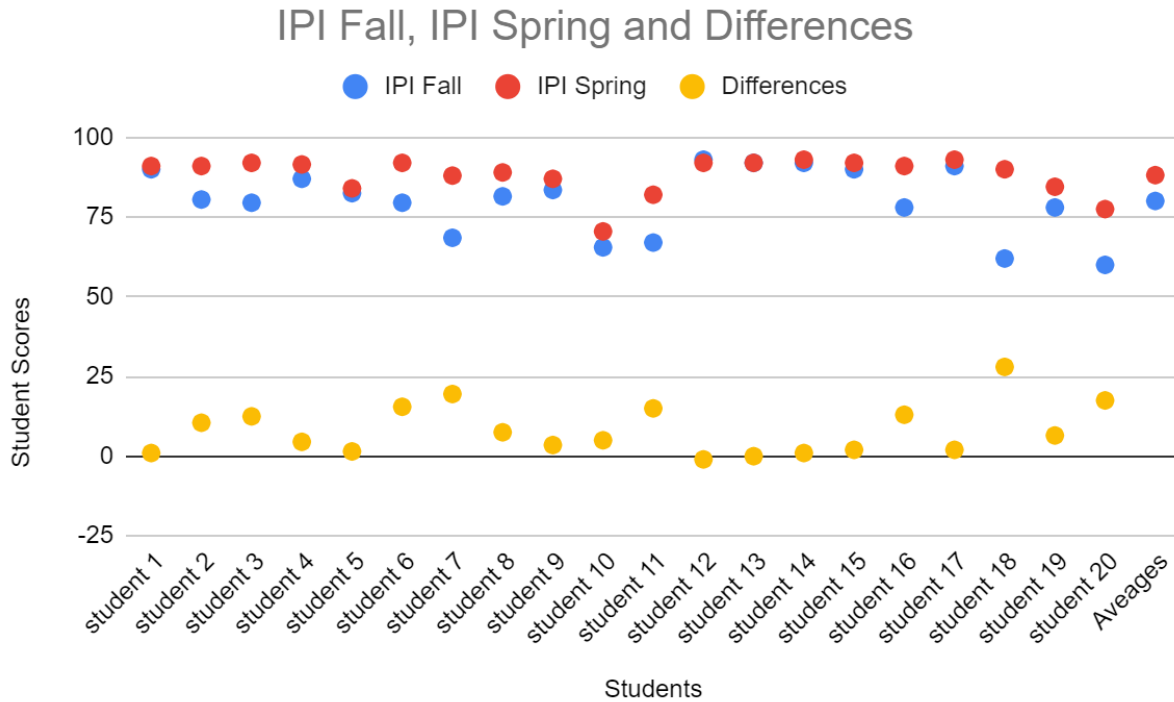


Figure 1. Students Informal Phonics Inventory scores.

After looking at their data, I was able to see that all but two students made slight or significant increases in their phonics knowledge and abilities according to the Informal Phonics Inventory (see Figure 1). The other two students either decreased or remained constant in their scores. The scores in blue and red represent students’ initial fall and spring scores, and the yellow represents the change in students’ scores from the fall to spring. The fall ranges from 60-93, while the spring ranges from 70.5-93. Students that were low or average readers made the most significant increases, while the GT students made only slight increases. It is also important to note that some struggling readers went to intervention classes during the school day to receive

additional reading instruction. Overall, the program has shown its effectiveness with the increase in assessment scores from the first to second semester.

Implications for Teachers

As I begin this study, I recognized, there was a lack of research conducted on phonics programs in general, and an even less amount of research done on RGR. I sought to find out what happens when RGR is implemented in a second grade classroom, and what students' and teacher perceptions of the program are. Additionally, I wanted to discover if the program was effective after gathering data from assessments taken in the fall, which was when the program was implemented and compare those scores to assessments results gathered in the spring. Four major themes emerged from this study that answered all my initial research questions and prompted new wonderings.

First, I found the program is systematic in how the lessons are planned and taught. The program follows a scope and sequence for when a phonics skill is taught. At the beginning, students are taught the sounds vowels, consonants, blends, digraphs, and diphthongs make. Then students begin breaking words into syllables and eventually learn more advanced phonics skills, such as letter and sound patterns and why a certain skill was the way it was. For example, prefixes go at the beginning of words and change the meaning of a word. Additionally, a routine is followed each week that focuses on a phonics skill to aid in decoding words. The program incorporates the same strategies, such as using syllaboards to break apart words, and using much whole group instruction. For a teacher that is using the program for this first time, they should be prepared to follow the same structure and format each week, which is beneficial because both the teacher and students will know what to expect each day during phonics instruction. The program is also hands on because students are able to work in pairs to build words using the letter tiles.

There is some preparation that teachers should be prepared for when using this program. They would need to take the time to familiarize themselves with the skill and know what the scripted lessons say. If they would like to use the workbook pages, they simply need to ensure they have time to make the copies. For a teacher that is new to the program, they may also want to consider gathering more materials or activities to supplement what the program may not provide, such as time to work in small groups or finding or creating engaging phonics games that students can do individually or in small groups to get further practice using the skill.

Second, I found that the program does provide opportunities for engagement, but it could be providing more. Finger stretching and clapping syllables are great for students that also prefer to simply hear the word be broken apart. The letter tiles provide for differentiation because simple or challenging word can be practiced, and it provides students with a kinesthetic movement of moving an object instead of writing. On the other hand, syllaboards provide the opportunity for students that need and prefer to write in order to break apart the syllables and need more of a visual representation. Also, coming up to the board to sort words provides another form of differentiation because students are seeing and hearing the word, and then they are able to come up to the board and move the word into the correct category. Based on the teacher interview, however, it is worthy to note that there is little differentiation provided or explicitly stated for students that are either gifted and talented or that already know a certain phonics rule and may not need a whole lesson on the skill, like other students do. It is for this reason, that teachers who may be starting this program will want to work in small group settings in order to be able to provide further differentiation for students that are high, average, or low in their reading skills.

The third major theme is that students are making progress. Although some areas could be improved or modified to meet the needs of all the different learners in your classroom, the program is still shown it is effective because students are able to make connections to what they are learning, such as being able to point out a word that includes the skill we learned, and it is effective for students that are average or low readers. These are the students that made the most progress and showed the most increase of scores from the pre- and post-assessments. For gifted and talented students, the program showed to be less effective because of the lack of differentiation for those students and the fact that those students are already above the average for reading. Their scores stayed the same or only went up by a few points in the pre- and post-assessments.

The last major theme that I found during this study was how it follows units and lessons in foundations, in other words, the content and standards that are taught in the program. In Texas, the program has covered all the state standards (TEKS) for phonics. Therefore, Texas teachers should not have to worry about whether or not the program teaches all the content standards if they choose to use this program. Another thing teachers should know is the books, which include scripted lessons, information about the phonics skills, and workbook pages include an abundance of information. The program is thorough in giving teachers information about each phonics skill in order to be able to teach it correctly.

As teachers, it is important that we understand the content knowledge and explain why it's important to learn. With this, we must also ensure that we are providing for the needs of all our students in the classroom when it comes to phonics instruction.

After conducting my research, I have additional questions that I am still wondering about that would make important topics for future research. Would students and teacher perceptions

about the program change if they were surveyed or interviewed again? Would students make even more growth if they were assessed again at the end of the year? If the classroom teacher implemented more differentiation, would student and teacher perceptions change? The first two questions would be important questions for future research because of the amount of time in which data was collected for this study, which was four weeks. If perceptions and scores were taken over a longer period of time, rather than a few weeks, would there be a change? The third question is important for future research because of the need for more differentiation. If more differentiation strategies were implemented using the program, such as working in small groups or working with partners, which there was a lack of during this study, then would teacher and students' perceptions change?

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Appendix A

Really Great Reading Attitude Survey

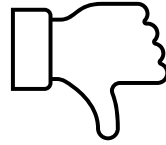
1. How do you feel about using the letter tiles to spell words?



I love it



I like it



I don't like it



I really don't like it

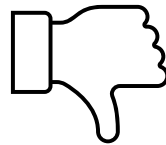
2. How do you feel about using the syllabboards to spell words?



I love it



I like it



I don't like it



I really don't like it

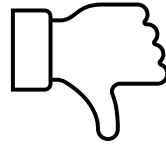
3. How do you feel about watching videos to learn spelling rules?



I love it



I like it



I don't like it



I really don't like it

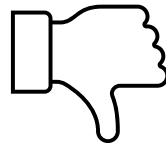
4. How do you feel about going up to the board and sorting words?



I love it



I like it



I don't like it



I really don't like it

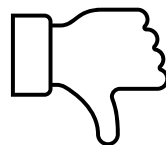
5. How do you feel when you are asked to read the spelling words as the end of the week?



I love it



I like it



I don't like it



I really don't like it

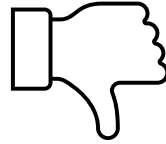
6. How do you feel using finger stretching to sound out words?



I love it



I like it



I don't like it



I really don't like it

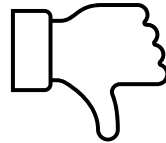
7. How do you feel when you clap the syllables of a word?



I love it



I like it



I don't like it



I really don't like it

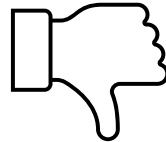
8. How do you feel when it is time for a spelling lesson?



I love it



I like it



I don't like it



I really don't like it

9. Write your response to the following sentence stem:

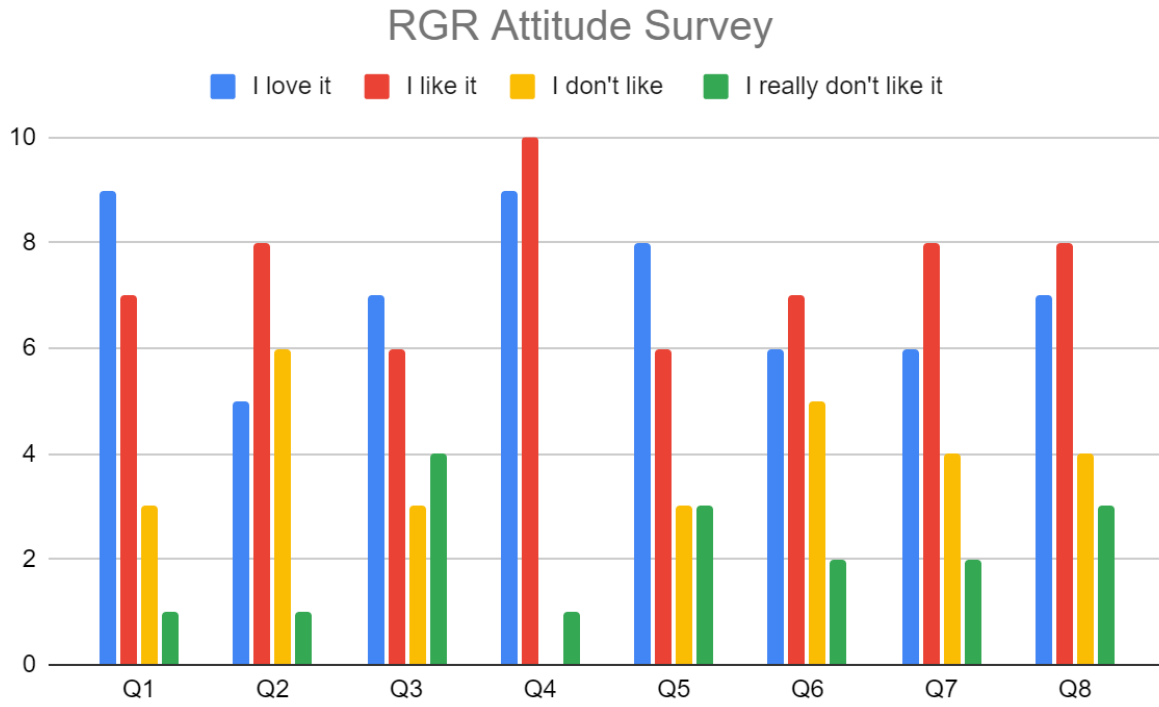
When we learn a new spelling rule I...

10. Write your response to the following sentence stem:

What helps me learn a new spelling rule the most is...

Appendix B

Survey Frequency Counts



Appendix C

Informal Phonics Inventory

Informal Phonics Inventory (page 5 of 7)

Informal Phonics Inventory

Name _____ Date _____

____/20 Consonant Sounds

S	D	F	G	H	J
K	L	Z	P	C	V
B	N	M	Qu	W	R
T	Y				

____/5 Consonant Digraphs

th	sh	ch	wh	ph
----	----	----	----	----

____/20 Beginning Consonant Blends

bl	fl	fr	gl
br	gr	pl	pr
cl	sk	sl	sm
cr	sn	sp	tr
dr	st	str	sw

____/12 Final Consonant Blends and ng

bank	apt	limp
band	pact	lilt
bang	lift	lisp
bask	lint	list

____/10 Short Vowels in CVC Words

fit	led	sup	lap	hug
rot	tin	rag	wet	job

____/4 The Rule of Silent e

cap	tot	cub	kit
cape	tote	cube	kite

____/10 Long-Vowel Digraphs

loaf	heat	aim	weed	ray
gain	fee	coal	leaf	due

____/6 Diphthongs

town	loud	joy	threw	oil	law
------	------	-----	-------	-----	-----

____/6 r-Controlled Vowels and -al

tar	hall	sir	port	hurt	fern
-----	------	-----	------	------	------

____/93 **Total**

(continued)

134

Appendix D

Code Book

Name	Level	Definition	Example
Reasons why phonics instruction is important.	1	Refers to any reason why phonics is important for reading, writing, or spelling.	“that will really help you with spelling. Now, with reading it might actually be able to help too, so you actually know how to pronounce it.”
How the phonics program was chosen	1	Reasons why the phonics program was chosen along with research that was done to find and select the program.	“And our instructional coordinator last year, Lucy Adams bought it cause she just researched different phonics programs, and she thought this one looked really great”
Different phonics programs that have been used	1	Any reference to another phonics programs or teacher created programs that aren’t RGR.	“Uhm, you know, I know other, I know other schools that use like Foundations, which is a different type of phonics program. And I know some that just use Pearson, which is the district phonics curriculum.”
COVID-19 prevented from starting last year.	1	Any reference to not being able to begin using the program when they were supposed to because COVID-19 prevented it from happening.	“but I know that it was bought last year right before COVID hit, they started it, and they just only got to use it in February.”
Systematic Phonics program	2	This is used as an umbrella term to describe any and all	“systematic in the way the plans fall each day.”

		aspects of the phonics program.	
Phonics instructional routine each week	1	This refers to the instruction and activities used in RGR that follow the same pattern each week.	“certain things we do each day, uhm, that is repeated each week”
Syllaboards help break apart words.	1	Any reference to using syllaboards, whether they mention if it helps break apart words or not	“They help me see what the letters are... what the word is spelled like.”
Focuses on phonics skills and decoding words.	1	Any time a student mentions a phonics skill they have learned or the classroom teacher describes phonics skills and how decoding words is an important part of phonics.	“Well, it, it focuses on you know, all the phonics skills they need to learn in second grade. And uhm it also focuses on not necessarily knowing how to spell every word, but more focusing on how to decode words.”
There is more whole group than games.	1	This refers to any time	“One thing I wish it did have was more uhm, like more games for them to do.”
The program is hands-on.	1	This is used to describe components of the program where students are using different materials to teach and learn a skill.	“I feel like it’s pretty hands on because, you know, it’s a lot of doing as were working together. It’s not just me standing up going, okay, this is the rule. Alright, now let me give you a worksheet.”
Preparing to teach a lesson.	1	Things the classroom teacher does to prepare for teaching a phonics skill such as looking through the unit book and familiarizing herself	“I always uh, look at it over the weekend, usually like Sunday afternoon I’ll sit down, and I’ll get a highlighter and I’ll read through the

		with the skill and examples.	lessons and I'll highlight like the materials they'll need, what video we're using for that day, and then I will highlight just, I read through it, and then I highlight what I think would be important to cover."
Workbook pages are helpful.	1	Any reference to workbook/practice pages that are done at the end of the week to review the skill.	"It's that uhm when we put the box around them and underline them, it's that I know these words, and it's really fun to do."
Would like more partner work.	1	The classroom teacher's view that she would like if the program had more opportunities for partner work.	"I would love for them to add some, some parts where they could work with partners."
Differentiation for more engagement	2	Any reference to the classroom teacher stating how she could differentiate the lessons for the different learners in her class.	"I may try to do some of this Really Great Reading during small group instruction, and that way I could differentiate more in a small group setting. So, you know, for my lower/average kids, we'll do the lessons. And then for my higher kids, they'll do the oral reading passages with me."
Finger stretching and clapping syllables.	1	Any reference to teacher or student feelings about finger stretching and clapping syllables.	"Like, I like it because when we finger stretch it, it feels like you're... instead of learning how it's spelled you can learn

			how it sounds with your mouth.”
Everyone likes doing tiles.	1	Any reference to students using the letter tiles to spell words.	“I like about it is it’s a little easy. You don’t have to write, you just gotta find it. Plus, it, when you’re used to the alphabet, and it’s kinda fun doing it.”
Sorting the words on the board	1	Any reference to students going to the promethean board and selecting the correct category for the word to go in.	“I do like that because it because you can when you do that, uhm, it separates two things you learn from one week to the other week and you, and it's a new refresher when you do that.”
Students have made progress.	2	Any time a student	“school I didn’t really know how like to spell, how to, how to read, but like when I came here and I started clapping things out, and I learned new words, it helped me, so now I got to get smarter and stuff.”
Students are making connections to what they are learning.	1	Any reference to students using or seeing a skill they have learned in a book or something they write	“Well, some I like, like <i>aw</i> for <i>awesome</i> I’ve actually seen that word like a lot in books, cause that’s usually the word they use in a lot of books.”
The program is effective for average readers.	1	This code is used when a student describes they generally enjoy using the program or they feel like they are learning something.	“Because it’s fun.”

<p>The program isn't as effective for GT students.</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>Any reference to the program not being as effective for the GT students in the class or students describing how they already know a phonics skill.</p>	<p>"Well, not really. I already know all the words you're telling me, so...well most of them"</p>
<p>The program follows units and lessons in foundations.</p>	<p>2</p>	<p>This refers to the organization of the program and how lessons are laid out.</p>	<p>"So, there's three books, and we're almost done with the second book"</p>
<p>The books give teachers much information.</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>The teacher guide books that script out each lesson and provide information about the phonics skills.</p>	<p>"it's very like scripted of what the teacher is supposed to say. It tells you word for word these are the materials you need, uhm this is what you're going to say. It even gives the teacher background information on this is what the phonics skill means, you know."</p>
<p>The program covers all the TEKS.</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>This code is used any time the TEKS are mentioned.</p>	<p>"It's covered everything that we're supposed to be teaching; all the TEKS we're supposed to be covering."</p>