

Research and Outcomes Department

Todd County School District, SD

Located in Rosebud, South Dakota, the Todd County School District includes the Rosebud Sioux Reservation which borders the Pine Ridge Reservation to the northwest and the state of Nebraska to the south. Rosebud Elementary, one of the Reservation's elementary schools, chose to use the Fast ForWord products during the 2004 – 2005 school year.

Two fourth grade classrooms took part in this study to evaluate the incremental benefit of Fast ForWord product use; one class used the Fast ForWord products and the other served as the comparison group. After product use, students who used the Fast ForWord products had greater accuracy on grade-appropriate material and higher oral reading fluency rates than the comparison group.

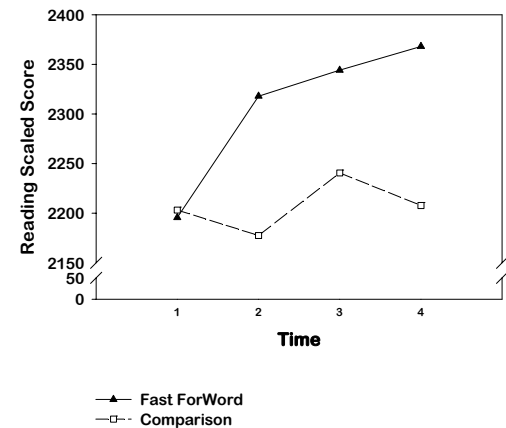
The Program Evaluation

Student reading ability was assessed with the Reading portion of the Scantron Performance Series and the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) at the beginning and end of the study, and between products.

The Scantron Performance Series assessment is a standards-based, norm- and criterion-referenced computer-adaptive measurement that assesses and tracks student academic growth. It adapts to a student's instructional level by changing the difficulty of questions based on previous answers. The Reading portion of this assessment is appropriate for students in grades 2 – 12.

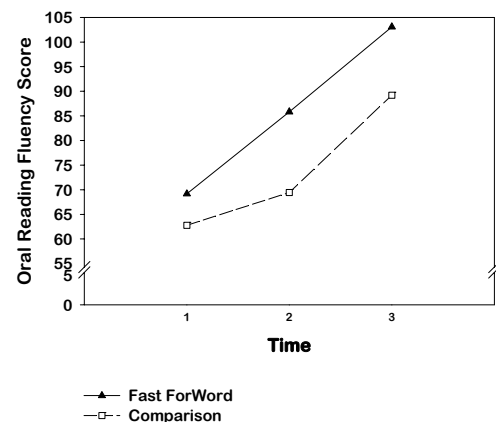
The DIBELS are standardized, individually administered measures of early literacy development designed to monitor the development of pre-reading and early reading skills. Skills assessed range from phonemic awareness to phonics to fluency. The appropriate skills for measuring with the DIBELS vary with the grade of the students. For students in the second grade and beyond, the appropriate measure is Oral Reading Fluency, which is a standardized test of accuracy and fluency. The Retell Fluency measure, which was also used in this study, assesses comprehension and the ability to extract meaning from

Improved Reading Achievement



The Fast ForWord group's improvements were significantly greater than the comparison group's after participation.

Improved Fluency



The Fast ForWord group had greater improvements in oral fluency after product use than the comparison group.

text. It is an optional measure that is used to provide a comprehension check of Oral Reading Fluency.

The Institute for the Development of Educational Achievement, in accordance with the Reading First legislation, recognizes the DIBELS as an appropriate assessment for measuring improvement in the reading skills of children in early elementary school.

Approach and Methodology

Educators were trained in current and established findings on the neuroscience of how phonemic awareness and the acoustic properties of speech impact rapid development of language and reading skills; methods for assessing potential product participants; the selection of appropriate measures for testing and evaluation; effective implementation techniques; approaches for monitoring student performance; and techniques for measuring the gains students have achieved after they have finished using the product. This training helped ensure successful product implementation.

Participation

There were 21 students in this study; half (11) used the Fast ForWord Language product and Fast ForWord Language to Reading products. They then used the appropriate Fast ForWord

to Reading product, as determined by their reading achievement after Fast ForWord Language to Reading use. The other half of the students (10) were in the comparison group. The Todd County School District chose to use the 50-Minute Fast ForWord Language and Fast ForWord Language to Reading Protocols and the 48-Minute Fast ForWord to Reading 1, Fast ForWord to Reading 2, and Fast ForWord to Reading 3 Protocols which call for students to use the products for 48 or 50 minutes a day, five days per week for eight to twelve weeks.

Assessment Results

On average, the Fast ForWord group made significantly greater improvements over time on reading achievement as measured by the Scantron Performance Series. The group that used Fast ForWord products also made significantly greater improvements in oral reading fluency improving to a reading rate of 103 correct words per minute compared to 89 words per minute by the comparison group. Neither the Fast ForWord group nor the comparison group was meeting the DIBELS ORF benchmark goal before use of the Fast ForWord products; both groups were in the “at risk” range. The Fast ForWord group made significant improvements over time in their average reading rate fluency, increasing into the “some risk” category.

Discussion

During the 2004 – 2005 school year, a group of fourth graders at Rosebud Elementary used the Fast ForWord products. Students were divided into two groups depending on their classroom: one that used the Fast ForWord products while the other served as a comparison group. After product use, the Fast ForWord group made significantly greater improvements over time than the comparison group on both the Performance Series and the DIBELS assessments.

These findings demonstrate that, within the Todd County School District, an optimal learning environment coupled with a focus on cognitive and early reading skills can help students attain a higher level of reading achievement.