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Improving Reading Skills Of Chapter I Third Grade Students Through The Infusion Of Daily Narrative And Expository Composition Into The Reading Program

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**IMPROVING READING SKILLS OF CHAPTER 1 THIRD GRADE
STUDENTS THROUGH THE INFUSION OF DAILY NARRATIVE AND
EXPOSITORY COMPOSITION INTO THE READING PROGRAM**

by

Flora S. Joiner

**A Practicum Report submitted to the Faculty of the
Center for Advancement of Education of Nova University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Science**

May, 1986

IMPROVING READING SKILLS

ABSTRACT AND INDEX

Title: Improving Reading Skills of Chapter 1 Students Through the Infusion of Daily Narrative and Expository Composition into the Reading Curriculum.
Joiner, Flora S., 1986: Practicum Report, Nova University, Center for the Advancement of Education
Descriptors: Language Experience Approach/Reading Comprehension/Reading Instruction/Reading Programs/Student Developed Materials/Reading Aloud to Others/Writing Composition/Creative Writing/Descriptive Writing/Expository Writing/Paragraph Composition/Narration/Pre-writing/Reading/Writing Improvement/Reading Improvement/Story Reading/Story Telling/Listening Comprehension/Elementary School Curriculum/Third Grade/

Based on a study of valuable literature, this writer decided to improve reading skills of 16 third grade Chapter 1 students, who had a reading deficiency of one and two years below grade level, through the infusion of creative narrative and expository writing into the reading curriculum. A review of available literature and the writer's own observation indicated that meaningful, correlated writing activities would improve comprehension of the written word. A ten week curriculum was planned and implemented, consisting of instructional strategies with an emphasis on creative writing, oral reading and listening skills. The students were posttested and their scores evaluated. All of the goals set by this writer were met and in fact exceeded as to more than one objective. (Appendices include lesson plans, posttests, evaluation exercises, surveys, and pre and posttest scores.)

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PURPOSE

The elementary school in which this practicum was conducted is a pod designed plant built approximately 11 years ago. The school is located in a low to middle socio-economic area of a predominantly Hispanic and Black neighborhood. The student population during the 1985/86 school year is 706 students from kindergarten through sixth grade. The ethnic composition for the school population is 52% Hispanic, 39% Black, 8% Caucasian, and 1% Asian. The current enrollment of 96 students in the third grade, which has two regular classes and three Chapter 1 classes, produces a pupil-teacher ratio of 16:1 in each Chapter 1 class and 24:1 in the two regular classes.

There are 26 regular classroom teachers and 17 Chapter 1 teachers in the targeted school. Approximately 45% of the instructional staff have master's degrees. The school personnel also includes one principal, one assistant principal, one media specialist, one counselor, one music teacher, two exceptional student teachers, 1.5 physical education teachers, one art teacher, three bilingual teachers, and four aides. The school shares a visiting teacher, a speech/hearing specialist, and a school

psychologist with two other schools. All of the above named staff are committed to providing the students with opportunities to help themselves develop a positive self-concept, a good set of values, sound health habits, and the opportunity for intellectual growth. The school provides extra-curricular activities such as academic enrichment, the school newspaper, student government, all under the supervision of school personnel. There is an after school or "after care" program with approximately 45 children enrolled. Study periods, games, rest, and snacks are provided for a small weekly fee. There is a Chapter 1 program at the school for grades one through six. The third grade has three Chapter 1 classes and two regular classes. The writer is the teacher for one of the third grade Chapter 1 classes. Chapter 1 is a federally funded program provided for students who are below their grade level in the basic skills areas. Chapter 1 students are placed into the program according to their scores on the Stanford Achievement Test. Those Students whose scores are at the 49th percentile or below in mathematics application and the 30th percentile or below in reading comprehension are automatically placed into the Chapter 1 program.

The writer's class is situated in an open learning center with three other third grade classes. The writer of this practicum has full responsibility for the teaching and management of a balanced curriculum, which is designed to meet all objectives for the third grade. Most of the day is devoted to individualized reading, language arts and mathematics instruction using a diagnostic/prescriptive approach. The remainder of the day includes language experience activities, oral language, art, music, and physical education.

The problem identified for this practicum deals with 16 Chapter 1 students in the writer's class whom the writer felt would benefit from a more meaningful approach to remedial reading instruction. Before implementation their reading levels ranged from primer to second grade/second semester, as evidenced by the school adopted reading series placement test, rather than the desired third grade/second semester level for their grade placement and chronological age. Although none of these children had been identified as learning disabled or as having any other exceptionality which might hinder their progress, their reading progress was impeded and/or delayed to the extent that some of them may face

retention.

Upon examination of the student's cumulative records the writer noted that their Stanford Achievement Test Scores for reading comprehension and listening skills range from the 3rd to 27th percentile in reading comprehension and from the 3rd to 54th percentile in listening skills, indicating the severity of the problem. Additionally, although all of the students are bilingual, six of the 16 students have recently exited from the ESOL (English for Speakers of other Languages) program, are not completely comfortable with English expression and possess limited vocabularies. Compounding the problem is the lack of an adequate experiential background to enhance their vocabularies and intuitive skills.

The writer sought to raise the reading levels and improve the individual skills of the 16 Chapter 1 students as well as to stimulate more pleasurable reading, through the infusion of original, meaningful compositions into the student's reading curriculum.

It was projected that the following outcome objectives would be achieved:

1. Over a ten week period, seventy-five percent of the students will show an improvement in oral reading by

making 10% fewer errors on a selected paragraph.

2. Over a ten week period, seventy-five percent of the students will show an improvement in reading comprehension of one full level on the Ginn Reading Program Placement Test.

3. Over a ten week period, seventy-five percent of the students will show an increase in sight vocabulary recognition of approximately fifty new words assessed by teacher's review of students' vocabulary lists.

4. Over a ten week period, seventy-five percent of the students will demonstrate the ability to place four sentences in correct sequence assessed by completion of selected exercises.

5. Over a ten week period, seventy-five percent of the students will show an improvement of 50% in time on task assessed by teacher observation of writing activities.

6. Over a ten week period, seventy-five percent of the students will demonstrate the ability to compare/contrast assessed by the completion of selected exercises.

7. Over a ten week period, seventy-five percent of the students will show an improvement of 40% in listening skills assessed by written evaluation to be given after oral story reading.

8. Over a ten week period, seventy-five percent of the students will show an improvement in the construction of a four to five sentence paragraph assessed by teacher's review and comparison of earliest stories with more recent stories in individual folders.

9. Over a ten week period, seventy-five percent of the students will show an increased love of reading by showing more interest in books.

RESEARCH

"Children do extensive reading when they re-read and revise their own texts. Since writing is the making of reading, children may decode for ideas differently than if they had never written at all." (Graves, 1983) With this premise in mind, the writer made a survey of recent relevant literature.

Elizabeth Sulzby (Sulzby, 1980) advised that the many claims about the advantages of language experience dictations should be investigated by teachers as to applicability in their respective classroom situations. The teacher functions as a guide during the rereading and editing process, which process facilitates reading comprehension.

Denise Bartelo's (Bartelo, 1984) study of the drawing, oral language and composing behaviors of selected LEP (Limited English Proficiency) children substantiated the inter-relatedness of the quality and quantity of experiential background on compositions.

Another study presented the premise to teachers and parents that pre-school children who visually attend to print in their environment acquire beginning reading skills more quickly. Students who work within a classroom

atmosphere conducive to spontaneous writing activities have a greater chance of learning to read having recognized the relationships between oral and written modes of language. (Bertrand and Fairchild, 1984)

Additional studies to determine the effectiveness of an integrative approach to language development through reading curriculum. Comparisons of an experimental and control group indicated that students exposed to language therapy within reading lessons improved scores significantly more than those students receiving traditional, non-integrated reading and language instruction. (Doyle, 1982)

The research conducted by Linda Spina and Dorothy Welhoelter concur that the ideal classroom is one in which the student feels free to express himse^{lf}/herself. In this type of classroom students come to understand that reading is their "talk and ideas" written down. (Spina and Welhoelter, 1981)

In a study as to how five year old children become literate, (Kita, 1979) Twenty kindergarten children were interviewed and shown four pictures and asked to complete a writing sample. The study suggested the use of print in a meaningful context could provide children with

opportunities to express themselves and develop a reason for reading.

To further investigate the inter-relatedness of the writing/reading phenomenon, the writer compiled two surveys regarding students' reading habits. (See Appendices G & H) The surveys, directed to the parents and students before implementation strategy, provided insight into habits and attitudes to be considered before strategies were undertaken.

One hundred percent of the parents surveyed stated that they would like to read stories written by their child. Eighty percent of the parents surveyed stated that they found it necessary to help their child with reading-related homework. Thirty percent of the parents surveyed replied that they had read a book report composed by their child.

Results of the student directed questionnaire indicated that 100% of the children wanted to write their own stories. Seventy-five percent of the children replied that they would need someone to help them write the stories. While only 30% stated they would like to write a book report, 90% indicated they would like to tell the class about a book they had read.

The research by the writer suggests that writing and reading skills are closely intertwined in the students' development and the more meaningful academic aural, oral and written experiences will provide the most transference to and augmentation of reading development.

The writer decided upon a strategy which utilized daily creative writing to improve students' reading skills. Permission was obtained from the administration at the target school to institute the strategy. In the Chapter 1 curriculum, ninety minutes each day is set aside for reading instruction. Thirty minutes each day is scheduled for the teaching of writing skills, in which time the teaching of spelling, handwriting, and composition must be accomplished. The writer included creative and expository writing activities during reading time in a direct attempt to improve students' reading skills and as a more practical consideration, the ninety minute interval afforded more time for the activity. This strategy afforded students the opportunity to create, read, revise, and re-read their own ideas as well as to listen to other students' ideas in an effort to improve reading skills.

METHOD

The writer decided to utilize daily creative writing to improve the reading skills of 16 Chapter 1 students. The reading levels of the children ranged from primer (Ginn Level 5) to second grade, first semester (Ginn Level 7) and their writing abilities varied by approximately the same amount.

This strategy was selected after careful review of related literature which suggested that children who are given opportunities to create, read, revise and re-read their own stories will become better readers.

Inasmuch as a language experience background had been developed with the students, the students were full of ideas and eager to compose their own individual stories at the outset of implementation. An orientation to the program was discussed briefly before implementation began and a survey of parents and children showed that an interest in creative composition did in fact exist. A week by week plan was designed and followed throughout the implementation period to include selected strategies to improve reading skills and ensure the successful completion of the outcome objectives. (See Appendix A)

Week One

Each student was given tagboard to make and decorate their composition folder. The writer explained that the contents of the folder would consist mainly of their own stories but a "New Word List" would also be an important part of the folder. Students were advised that new words should be added to the list whenever stories were written and read.

Topics from students' experiential background were chosen and story writing was begun. Topics included "My Family", and "A Pet I Would Like". Stories were read orally upon completion. Ten new words were placed on students' lists.

Week Two

Story writing from students' experiential background continued. Topics included "Viteri's Turtles", "The Disaster in Space" and "What I Like to Play at Home". Stories were read orally upon completion and ten new words were added to students' lists.

Week Three

Before library day, the class discussed their interests and books relating to the same. With the media specialist's and teacher's help, each child checked out a book relating to his/her interest.

A classroom collection relating to these interests was also obtained by the teacher. Interests included trucks, baby animals, zoo animals, computers, dancing, football, racing cars, dolls, ants, bicycles and motorcycles.

Students were introduced to a simple book report form (See Appendix F) and guided through their first book report. Reports were read orally upon completion. Ten new words were added to students' word lists.

Individual reading groups (this writer's class contained three different levels) were instructed to compose stories using selected vocabulary words from their appropriate units. Stories were read orally upon completion. Ten new words were added to students' word lists.

Week Four

Writing in sequential order was introduced. The class discussed the order in which certain events happen and how to list these events chronologically. The key words used in relating sequential order of events "first", "next", "then", and "last" were suggested to the children. The first topic to be written about was "What I Did in Art," since the children had just returned from art class. Other topics chosen by the students included "When I Clean My Room", "When I Go to School" and "What I Do in School Each Day". Stories were read orally upon completion. Ten new words were added to each list upon completion of reading of each particular topic.

Week Five

The concept of comparing and contrasting people, places and things was introduced. The class discussed the similarities and differences of people (Marisol and Yvette) places (school and home) and things (A bowl of fruit). The first topic written about was the comparison of the attributes of the bowl of fruit. Other topics

written about were comparisons of a student and his/her friend, mother and father, pets and wild animals and school and home. Stories were read orally upon completion and ten new words were added to students' word lists upon completion of each particular topic.

This writer met with students individually to check their composition folders, listen to them read orally, to check new word lists and to check recognition and meaning of the new words.

Week Six

Students completed their second required book report. The ongoing classroom library based on students' interests provided an abundance of reading material and students completed this report virtually unassisted. The simple report form was designed to encourage students to pass the book on to a fellow student as well as to stimulate further reading. (See Appendix F) Reports were read orally upon completion and ten new words were added to students' lists.

Students were instructed to compose stories utilizing words from the new word lists. Some topics chosen were

"When I Was Sick", "Why I Like Art" and "My New Bicycle". Many students encountered difficulty with this particular task as they were inclined to write stories similar to the previously written stories from which the "new words" came. Stories were read orally and five new words were added to the list. A discussion was held on why words chosen from the list and used to compose stories were no longer "new" and why we have to find words not previously used.

Week Seven

Sequential order in compositions was reviewed. Students were reminded of the key words "first", "next", "then" and "last". Since story composition had at this time reached a more sophisticated level, students were advised that "first" need not be followed by "next" but that intervening sentences could be interspersed between the key words (a problem for some). Some topics selected were "Bees Make a Hive", "An Ant Colony", "When I Went to the Zoo" and "When My Cousin Comes to Visit".

Students were instructed to compose stories from vocabulary utilized in the particular unit of study in

their individualized reading group.

Stories were read after completion and ten new words were added to the list.

Week Eight

Students were instructed to compose a story comparing or contrasting two places they had visited. A suggested topic was a comparison of two recent field trips (Disney on Ice and The Museum of Science/Planetarium). Stories were read after completion and fifteen new words were added to the students' lists.

Students composed their third required book report. Reports were read orally after completion and ten new words were added to students' word lists.

Week Nine

Students completed their fourth required book report. Some topics included planets, dinosaurs, insect colonies, polar bears, dogs and fairy tales.

Students were instructed to compose two fictional stories. A discussion was held about fictional

story-telling and a plan was instituted to make all the stories into a booklet. Students were encouraged to make their stories at least one page long. Stories were read upon completion and prizes were awarded for "funniest story", "longest story", and "scariest story".

Week Ten

The writer administered the following post-tests:

1. Ginn Reading Program Placement Test.
(See Appendix C)
2. Sequential Order. (See Appendix D)
3. Comparison Exercise. (See Appendix E)
4. Informal Word Identification Quiz from word lists.
5. Informal oral reading inventory. (See Appendix B)

Students were requested to complete an interest survey (See Appendix I) regarding the project.

Certificates were awarded for most creative story writer, best oral reader, best listener and most improved oral reader. Based upon class discussion of criteria for selection, choices were made by a secret balloting vote.

RESULTS

The third grade Chapter 1 students participating in this program were observed throughout the implementation period. It was felt by this writer that a gradual introduction of specific skills to be mastered on a week-by-week basis would allow the students to work more comfortably and would allow the reading/writing enhancement to appropriately mesh.

A standard pretest was administered by this writer prior to the implementation period and the same test was administered as a posttest at the completion of the ten week period. (See Appendix C) In addition, certain written and oral teacher-made exercises were administered at the completion of the ten week period to assess mastery of specific outcome objectives. (See Appendices B, D & E)

As shown on the chart of pre and posttest scores (See Appendix J), the Ginn pretest scores ranged from Ginn Level 5 to Ginn Level 7, whereas the scores ranged from Ginn Level 7 to Ginn Level 9 on the posttest. A goal was set by the writer for the students to raise their scores one full level from pretest to posttest and success was more than achieved.

It was projected that over a ten week period 75% of

the students would improve in oral reading by making 10% fewer errors on a selected paragraph. (See Appendix B) An informal reading inventory at the conclusion of the ten week period showed 100% of the children achieved this goal.

Another outcome objective projected that over the ten week period 75% of the students would show a sight vocabulary increase of approximately 50 new words. Based upon an informal word recognition test given individually to each student by this writer, 50% of the children achieved an increase of 75 or more new words while the remaining 50% achieved the goal of recognizing 50 new words from their lists.

Based upon completion of a teacher-made sequencing exercise (See Appendix D) the projected goal of 75% of the students being able to place four sentences in correct sequence was more than achieved. One hundred percent of the students demonstrated the ability to sequence four sentences correctly and 85% of the students demonstrated the ability to write their own paragraph in correct sequence.

At the outset of implementation a guideline of 20-25 minutes was set for completion of stories. This guideline

presented a problem for at least 25% of the children at the beginning of the implementation period and these students were given the opportunity to complete their stories during any free time they might have. By the end of the implementation period, this writer observed that 100% of the students were able to complete their stories during the allotted 25 minutes.

It was estimated that over the ten week period 75% of the students would be able to demonstrate the ability to identify a comparison paragraph and based upon a teacher-made exercise (See Appendix E). Seventy-five percent of the students demonstrated the ability to do this. Fifty percent of the students were able to compose their own four sentence paragraph comparing two people, places, or things. (See Appendix E)

An informal evaluation of listening skills improvement was given at the end of the ten week period and results showed that each student (100%) was able to correctly answer four questions relating to a story read by one of his/her peers. The goal of 75% of the students improving 40% was met and in fact exceeded. This writer noted that the students were usually extremely attentive to oral story reading by their peers.

An evaluation of students' stories and folders as to quantity and quality was conducted at the end of the fifth week and at the end of the ten week period. This writer noted that 100% of the students' compositions had improved as to length of paragraph, clarity of composition, sentence structure and punctuation.

Based on a survey administered to the students at the end of the ten week period, 100% of the students showed an increased interest in books and reading, meeting and exceeding this writer's projected goal of a 75% increase.

Determined by the data collected and observed by this writer, the projected objectives were met and the project was accepted with an enthusiastic response by all students. The Post-Implementation Survey administered to the students substantiated evidence of their enjoyment of the project as did this writer's observation of the students positive responses and attitudes toward the project.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This strategy is one that could not only serve as a model for other Chapter 1 classes but for any regular classes and could be implemented successfully at any grade level.

Throughout the school year there are numerous reading and writing workshops presenting educators with clever and innovative ideas to generate interest in the reading/writing phenomenon. This writer believes there is an underlying interest in all children to compose and relate their ideas to others and with guidance their desire to create can generate greater interest in reading and increase ability to read. This strategy was met with enthusiasm by both students and parents and the objectives were successfully met and exceeded. Based upon this writer's observation of the strategy and implementation, this writer believes that the objectives were met and exceeded in great part due to high interest level in the students' work of their peers.

The writer shared this strategy with several third and second grade Chapter 1 teachers at her site and they have incorporated the strategy into their reading program. This writer plans to incorporate this program into the

writer's reading curriculum each year. Additionally, the strategy was shared with the Chapter 1 Facilitator at the practicum school site and the writer plans to present the project and its positive results at the first Chapter 1 area workshop next fall.

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APPENDIX A

Creative Writing Lessons

- Week 1 Introduction;
Create a folder;
Start a word list;
Choose story topics from students' experiential background;
Start them reading stories orally;
Stress listening to others' stories;
- Week 2 Continue to use story topics from students' experiential background and from current events;
Read orally;
Stress listening;
Build on word list;
- Week 3 Begin to select and build-up a classroom library based on students' interests;
Introduce book report form and guide students through the first book report;
Compose stories utilizing vocabulary from students' reading levels;
Read orally;
Build on word list;
- Week 4 Introduce sequencing in students' stories. Begin with a familiar activity and then let children pick topics;
Stress correct time order and organized thinking;
Read orally;
Stress listening;
Build on word list;
- Week 5 Introduce concept of compare/contrast. Start with concrete concepts, i.e., "Marisol is short with brown hair, while Yvette is tall with black hair. They are both girls.", etc.;
Meet with individual students to review progress; in oral reading, vocabulary development and comprehension;

- Check word lists for quantity and quality of compositions in folder;
 Read orally;
 Stress listening;
 Continue to build on word list;
- Week 6 Compose second book report;
 Compose a story utilizing words from individual word lists;
 Read orally;
 Stress listening;
- Week 7 Review proper sequencing in compositions;
 Compose a story utilizing vocabulary from individual reading levels;
 Read orally;
 Stress listening;
- Week 8 Review compare/contrast in composition;
 Compose third book report;
 Read orally;
 Stress listening;
- Week 9 Free writing;
 Compose fourth book report;
 Read orally;
 Stress listening;
 Awards for most creative writer, best oral reader, best listener, most improved oral reader;
- Week 10 Posttests, (See Appendices)
 Vocabulary evaluation;
 Ginn Reading Placement Posttest;
 Oral reading;
 Sequence exercises;
 Comparison exercises;
 Project Interest survey;

APPENDIX B

Selected Paragraphs

Level Six

Who could live here? Someone has climbed up a tree. Can you find her? A girl and boy are playing ball. Who will catch the ball? Who will hit the ball? Find a hole in the tree. What animal could live there?

Level Seven

A rainbow is a mystery of science. Think about it. Where does a rainbow come from? Where does it go? When the sun shines through the rain we see beautiful colors in the sky. Every rainbow has the same colors; purple, blue, green, yellow, orange, and red. Where do the colors come from? Where do they go?

Level Eight

Mr Goodman knew about a special place in the city. It was a large aquarium. An aquarium is a zoo for fish and other sea animals. At some aquariums, sea animals do tricks and live on an island. Lots of people visit these aquariums. They come to see the fish and water shows.

APPENDIX D

Sequence Exercise

Name:

Date:

Our Morning in School

(Number the sentences in the correct order)

----- We do our math work.

----- Some of us go to computer.

----- The lunch monitor passes out the cards.

----- We do our reading work.

(Write a paragraph about what you did this morning as you got ready to come to school. Be sure your sentences are in the right order.)

APPENDIX E

Comparison Exercise

Name:

Date:

(Choose the paragraph that correctly compares two things)

-----A. The apples we eat are round, juicy and red. They are very good for us. They help to clean our teeth after we eat. The sweet snacks like cookies that we eat look good and taste sweet. But they are not good for us. They have too much sugar and are bad for our teeth.

-----B. The Empire State Building is one of the tallest buildings in the world. It is located in New York City. It has 102 floors and it takes a long, long time to get to the top of the building.

*** WRITE YOUR OWN PARAGRAPH COMPARING TWO PEOPLE IN OUR CLASS.

APPENDIX F

Book Report Form

My Own Book Report

Name:

The title of the book was

The author of the book was

These sentences tell what the story was about: (Write at least four sentences.)

I would tell my friends to read this book because

The next book I read will be about

APPENDIX G

Parent's Reading/Writing Survey

1. Does your child ever compose stories?

Yes No

2. Would you like to read stories composed by your child?

Yes No

3. Does your child read many books at home?

Yes No

4. Would you like to see your child read more books?

Yes No

5. Have you ever read a book report composed by your child?

Yes No

6. Do you usually have to help your child with reading or language homework?

Yes No

Thank you for your cooperation.

Parent's Signature

APPENDIX H

Student's Reading/Writing Survey

1. Do you ever write your own stories?

Yes No

2. Would you like to write more of your own stories?

Yes No

3. Would you need someone to help you write your own stories?

Yes No

4. Do you read many books?

Yes No

5. Would you like to be able to read more books?

Yes No

6. Have you ever written a book report?

Yes No

7. Would you like to be able to write a book report?

Yes No

8. Would you like to tell the class about a book you have read?

Yes No

Student's Signature

APPENDIX I

Project Interest Survey

Your Name:

1. Did you like to write your own stories?

Yes No

2. How many stories did you write? -----

3. What is your favorite kind of story to write?

----about play

----about school

----about pets

----about news events

----other kinds-----

4. Did you like to read library books and write book reports?

Yes No

5. Do you think you have become a better reader?

Yes No

6. Do you want to write stories again next year in fourth grade?

Yes No

APPENDIX J

Ginn Reading Program Placement Test Scores

Name	Pretest Level	Posttest Level
Andres	7 (2)	8 (2.5)
Chanarrow	5 (P)	6 (1.0)
Elizabeth	7 (2)	8 (2.5)
Ernel	6 (1)	7 (2.0)
Ivette	7 (2)	7 (2.0)
Ivis	5 (P)	7 (2.0)
Jessica	6 (1)	7 (2.0)
Johnny	7 (2)	7 (2.0)
Joseph	7 (2)	8 (2.5)
Latanua	6 (1)	7 (2.0)
Leyton	7 (2)	8 (2.5)
Marisol	7 (2)	8 (2.5)
Michael	6 (1)	7 (2.0)
Shannon	7 (2)	9 (3.0)
Uiteri	7 (2)	8 (2.5)
Wadada	7 (2)	8 (2.5)

Levels:

- (P) = Primer
- (1) = First Reader
- (2) = Second Reader, First Level
- (2.5) = Second Reader, Second Level
- (3) = Third Reader, First Level