Corrective Reading and Achievement

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Abstract

The first belief stated in the Ministry of Education’s document Learning for All (2011) is “All students can succeed” (p. 6). Yet, in the 21st Century, many children continue to struggle with basic reading skills, decoding, and phonemic awareness. These alarming statistics can no longer be ignored. With sufficient time and support, students can learn to read. This action research study focused on the benefits of reading intervention with a small group of formally identified students. Mostly labeled as Learning Disabled, these students were withdrawn from the regular classroom by the special education teacher who focused on delivering Decoding A – Word-Attack Basics from SRA’s Corrective Reading Program (2008) developed by Engelmann, Carnine and Johnson. Siegfried Engelmann’s Direct Instruction approach was found by this researcher to be successful with students in the Junior and Intermediate divisions identified as having a learning disability. SRA’s Corrective Reading Decoding A, a Direct Instruction program, was successful with the problem readers because it provided careful integration, the practice, and the management details that the students needed to succeed. All that is required is time, careful planning, and a willingness to positively engage pupils in reading recovery so that they might experience increased reading achievement and academic success.

Keywords: decoding, learning disabled, corrective reading, Direct Instruction
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Corrective Reading and Achievement

In order to be a lifelong learner being able to read to learn, it is critical that every student first learn to read. Despite the many studies done on learning disabilities and reading deficiencies, many children in the 21st Century continue to struggle with basic reading skills, decoding, and phonemic awareness. In particular many formally identified students who have an Individual Education Plan lag behind their peers, making their educational journey challenging. If children have not mastered the skill of reading by grade 3, their achievement gap only widens. Given that the Ministry of Education’s mandate is to reach every student, educators need to step up to the plate and focus on teaching reading, beginning with decoding. This action research study focused on the use of SRA’s Corrective Reading Decoding A, a Direct Instruction Program created by Siegfried Engelmann et al. (1999). The study followed some formally identified students who struggled in reading and attempted to give them the tools needed to properly decode basic words in order to increase reading achievement.

Rationale for the Study

Despite years of research from some of the best in the field of education, reading difficulties still exist. Even when money to provide extra support is pumped into the education system, some children still struggle with basic reading skills. In particular, many formally identified students experience difficulty with reading and never catch up to their peers.

Statement of the Problem

Regardless of the No Child Left Behind Act, 2001 (NCLB) in the United States of America and the Reach Every Student mandate (2008) in the province of Ontario, in
many classrooms, some children still struggle with basic decoding skills when reading. Special education students are especially at risk. Some special education students in the Junior and Intermediate divisions still struggle with basic decoding skills when reading. This impacts their learning as the basic premise to reading is reading to learn. The achievement gap only widens if basic reading skills and phonemic awareness are not mastered by grade 3. School data such as the June 2012 Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) and the spring 2012 Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) assessment showed that students at St. Charles Catholic School remained below the provincial standard in Reading. Early Reading Intervention had been offered to a select group of primary students, but until this year, reading intervention within the context of a Resource setting was not feasible to students beyond grade 3. Since test scores remained low and there was little movement in students’ running records, reading levels, and reading assessments, it was felt that a more focused, direct approach to teaching decoding skills to Junior and Intermediate students would be increasingly helpful. Figure 1 illustrates EQAO test results from the spring of 2012 for grade 3 students and Figure 2 explains EQAO test results from that same year for grade 6 students.
Figure 1. Percentage of grade 3 students at or above the provincial standard (Level 3 and 4), 2011-2012. Gr. 3 EQAO scores for St. Charles School compared to the Sudbury Catholic District School Board and the province of Ontario. Data retrieved from EQAO.

Figure 2. Percentage of grade 6 students at or above the provincial standard (Level 3 and 4), 2011-2012. Grade 6 EQAO scores from St. Charles School compared to the Sudbury Catholic District School Board and the province of Ontario. Data retrieved from EQAO.
Furthermore, scores from the June 2012 Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) indicated that, based on the Ontario Language Curriculum, there was a definite weakness in the Reading for Meaning expectation. Until this school year, corrective reading was not offered to students beyond grade 3. Struggling students’ needs were addressed by individual classroom teachers within the literacy block, to include guided and shared reading. Clearly, this was not making a difference as test scores remained low and there was little movement in students’ running records, reading levels, and reading assessments. It was felt that a more focused, direct approach would be increasingly helpful. In consultation with classroom teachers, the researcher and special education staff selected a small population of formally identified students through the Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC).

**Research Questions**

For this study, two research questions were developed. First, will Corrective Reading sessions focused on decoding increase reading achievement in identified students? Secondly, the researcher wondered if achievement in reading would improve if students with similar needs, but from different grade levels, were withdrawn from the regular classroom to receive small group direct instruction on decoding.

**Hypothesis**

Student performance of Junior and Intermediate division special education students who struggle with basic decoding skills will improve when students are withdrawn four times a week to participate in Corrective Reading sessions focused on decoding skills.


**Literature Review**

This literature review outlines some of the major studies conducted on Direct Instruction. More specifically, it addresses the use of Corrective Reading intervention to enhance achievement in special education. The research demonstrates the effectiveness of Engelmann’s SRA Corrective Reading Program, which focuses on decoding skills. While much research has been conducted in primary grades, not a lot of work has been done to address reading difficulties from grades four and beyond. There remains a lot of controversy with respect to teaching older struggling students reading skills to include decoding and phonemic awareness. This literature review discusses the pros and cons of specific interventions to include Direct Instruction and small group resource withdrawal.

**Reading Strategies and Research**

Students who have a learning disability struggle in reading and “without intervention strategies, the learning gap may never be narrowed” (Jackson, 2010, p. 1). In her thesis dissertation, Jackson (2010) begins with a review of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) passed by President George W. Bush in 2001. The author discusses how in the last 30 years, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reports that “reading achievement has remained basically unchanged” (Jackson, 2010, p. 3). Most teachers, have adopted a balanced literacy approach to reading instruction, however test scores remain low. The author’s research is based on studies in the field that put emphasis on phonemic awareness and decoding skills. “Several reading programs have been designed to effectively use phonemic decoding skills to successfully educate reading skills” (Jackson, 2010, p. 4).
Jackson examined closely the SRA Corrective Reading Program, which focuses on decoding skills. “There has been a great deal of debate between the whole word teaching method and the phonemic awareness teaching method” (Jackson, 2010, p. 9). She believes that phonemic awareness is effective with students who are beginning to read but becomes less effective as the reader matures. “The SRA Reading Program is a direct instruction program designed to ensure success because students move at a slow pace with individual or small-group instruction which allows students to practice and repeat specific skills, such as comprehension and decoding skills needed to master reading” (Jackson, 2010, p. 6). The basis of her study was well researched beginning in 1960 with Siegried Engelmann’s studies on Direct Instruction.

Fuchs and Fuchs (2009) also believe that students should be given opportunities for intensive intervention as in 2007 it was reported that “one quarter of students with LD dropped out of school” (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2009, p. 2). Despite intensive intervention to include tutoring programs and on-going progress monitoring to tailor individualized programs, the students involved in their study had less than desirable results in reading achievement. The researchers’ dilemma remains that in order to create opportunities for intensive intervention, students must “miss some portions of the general education program, and educators need guidance about what portions of the general education program are unlikely to benefit students with LD who suffer large skill deficits” (Funchs & Funchs, 2009, p. 4). This challenges other experts in the field who support reading intervention by pulling students out of the regular classroom. Effects of Corrective Reading on the Reading Abilities and Classroom Behaviors of Middle School Students with Reading Deficits and Challenging Behavior, an article published in 2006, supports
Direct Instruction for struggling middle school students, claiming that overall, “students who received DI consistently outperformed students in comparative groups, and the DI techniques were effective in facilitating academic success for students of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds” (Lingo, Bott, Slaton & Jolivette, 2006, p. 2).

Brundage, Beckmann-Bartlett, and Burns illustrate their study to take on Response to Intervention (RTI) at Alice Birney Middle School, as test scores were consistently low. This action research focused on using the SRA Corrective Reading Program to address decoding in an explicit manner. Challenges included scheduling, time, and resources, but reviewing the data on a weekly basis proved successful in moving students forward. Recognizing that change in education is slow, their testimonial with respect to the implementation of RTI is convincing: “We have a long way to go, but we are headed down the right path and our students are benefiting as a result” (Brundage et al., 2010, p. 11).

Many schools across the county continue to create opportunities for extra drill and practice to build reading accuracy and fluency. “Although learning to read is critical for success in our society, large numbers of students continue to have difficulty acquiring basic literacy skills” (Begeny & Martens, 2006, p. 91). Their study listed many empirically validated reading interventions but cautioned against the interventions draining financial and human resources. “Overall the findings from this study suggest that combining several previously validated fluency-building interventions into a treatment package can be successful as a group-based intervention, and can be flexible enough to involved students in varying reading levels” (Begeny & Martens, p. 106).
Another study to support Direct Instruction was conducted by Diliberto, Beattie, Flowers, and Algozzine (2009). “The purpose of the present investigation was to determine whether adding direct, explicit, and systematic instruction of syllable skills with phonetically regular nonsense in low-frequency word practice and decoding and encoding to remedial instruction would increase reading achievement at a faster rate in students with high incidence disabilities” (Diliberto et al., 2009, p. 15). They used the Corrective Reading Decoding Program designed to enhance decoding skills in at-risk elementary and middle school readers. They also tried Success Maker which “is a computer-based program designed to provide students with independent reading comprehension practice at the student’s independent reading level” (Diliberto et al., 2009, p. 18). There was a greater increase in reading achievement from pre-test and post-test on word identification, word attack, and reading comprehension. The researchers describe the treatment group as demonstrating large differences between fluency pre-test to post-test means ranging from Cohen’s d values of .59 to 1.12.

While the studies mentioned have been relatively small scale, it should be noted that “the first thing one has to realize about intervention in the middle grades is that there is virtually no research base upon which we can draw” (Allington, 2001, p. 10). This is because almost all research in the area of reading intervention to date has been conducted with students in grades K to 5, but mostly in the primary grades. Wanzek, Wexler, Vaugh and Ciullo (2010) synthesized 20 years of research in a rather extensive study to include 13 studies with treatment/comparison, plus 11 single group subject studies for a total of 24. Their research question looked specifically at the effectiveness of reading interventions on reading outcomes for students with reading difficulties and disabilities in
fourth and fifth grade. Based on extensive studies found on ERIC, these researchers examined the efficacy of methods to improve reading outcomes for older students who struggle in reading. Word recognition interventions did not produce large effects on a range of reading outcomes.

While much of the literature review has been around Direct Instruction and Corrective Reading techniques, Fuchs and Fuchs (2009) also speak of the implications of teacher training and what it means to be a highly qualified special education teacher for a student with a learning disability. These researchers challenge special education reform that “will require reauthorization of laws that upgrade opportunities for intensive intervention for students with LD” (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2009, p. 62). While statistics show that “forty percent of students with LD have general education teachers who receive no information about their instructional needs, and only eleven percent of students with LD receive substantial modifications to the general education curriculum” (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2009, p. 60), Allington states that it’s up to the teachers, not programs to engage middle school children in reading. He studied Ivey and Baker (2004) who report that “in all our work with older struggling readers, we have not come across a single student who would benefit from phonemic awareness or phonics training” (Ivey & Baker, 2004, p.35). He goes on to say that “huge federal expenditures on special education services have not provided special education students with any advantages when it comes to learning to read” (Allington, 2011, p. 12). Like Fuchs and Fuchs (2009), Allington proposes a redesign of middle school instruction by implementing the five following basic principles:

- All students need high quality instruction all day long
• Expand the volume of reading that struggling readers do every day
• Students need books they can read and books they are interested in reading
• Decoding instruction is rarely useful for older struggling students
• It is more than the students that present the problem that needs to be solved (Allington, 2011, pp.12-14).

While many experts in the field of education support Direct Instruction and Corrective Reading such as SRA in middle school, the topic remains controversial. With respect to persistent reading difficulties, Denton et al. (2006) suggest a fluency intervention program called Phono-Graphix delivered daily for two hours and then one hour per day for the second segment of eight weeks. “The 16-week intervention resulted in significant improvement in reading decoding, fluency, and comprehension” (Denton, Fletcher, Anthony & Francis, 2006, p. 447). Their study was an extension of reading intervention to students who had received extra support in grade 1, yet still struggled in middle school. Despite intensive decoding instruction for a longer period of time, the outcomes of students in this study were similar to other students who received similar intense interventions in studies conducted by other researchers such as Torgeson, Alexander, Wagner, Rashotte, Voeller, and Conway (2001). Students often “attained significant growth in decoding, but only limited change in fluency” (Denton et al. 2006, p. 462).

There are often limitations and issues of validity in studies, both small and large scale. For this literature review, the most common limitation was that participating students were “not a demographic representation of the general population” (Jackson, 2010, p. 80). Teacher training with respect to intervention programs varied, protocols in
various school locations differed, and general tools of measurement were not consistent. All in all, small sample populations and the duration of the various studies were inconsistent. Although studies on Direct Instruction and reading intervention are limited amongst older students, there are an increasing amount of experiments now available to researchers. This will be helpful in the future.

Lingo, Bott Slaton and Jolivette (2006) along with this researcher, “recognize the need to research the effectiveness of the most recent edition of the Corrective Reading program (Engelmann et al., 1999) on the reading achievement of students with reading difficulties” (Lingo, Bott Slaton & Jolivette, 2006, p. 267). The findings from most of the studies reviewed supported the benefits of Direct Instruction on the reading performances of struggling middle school students with Individual Education Plans. Many of the studies provided support “to the popular theory surrounding direct, explicit, and systematic instruction in syllable skills to deficient readers” (Diliberto et al., 2009, p. 26).

**Methodology**

Some special education students in the Junior and Intermediate divisions still struggle with basic decoding skills when reading. This deficit certainly impacts their learning. The Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) conduct yearly mandatory provincial assessment to grades 3 and 6 students in reading, writing and mathematics. School data show that students at St. Charles Catholic School remain below the provincial standard. Furthermore, school Developmental Reading Assessment data confirmed that, based on the Ontario Curriculum, there was a definite weakness in Reading. Results could no longer be ignored. In consultation with classroom teachers,
the researcher and special education staff selected a small population of formally identified students to participate in SRA’s Corrective Reading Series, a Direct Instruction program focused on decoding skills. This section will identify and explain the intervention used and will give a detailed analysis of the data collected by the sample population.

**Research Design**

This study involved an analysis of the SRA Corrective Reading Series designed in 1999 by Siegfried Engelmann and his team of researchers. Each level of SRA’s Corrective Reading Decoding programs has features that have been demonstrated through research studies to be effective in improving student performance. “The Decoding strand directly addresses all critical reading components identified by the National Reading Panel (2002) – phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension” (Engelmann, Carnine & Johnson, 2010, p. 2). The series is designed to change the behavior of the problem reader. The specific decoding tendencies of the problem reader suggest what a program must do to be effective in changing a student’s behavior. As struggling readers get older, their ineffective reading strategies and negative attitudes about reading often become more ingrained. To change this pattern, a very carefully planned program, one that systematically replaces the strategies with new ones, and provides a lot of praise and practice, is required.

**Intervention**

The researcher oversaw the implementation of the SRA Corrective Reading Series delivered to a small group of students. SRA’s Corrective Reading programs are divided into two strands: Decoding and Comprehension. Decoding A is appropriate for students
in grades 3 through high school who are extremely deficient in decoding skills. Students were withdrawn four times per week by the Learning Strategies Teacher (LST) and participated in Decoding A, which consists of 65 lessons. Upon successful completion, candidates can move along the SRA Corrective Reading program and participate in Decoding B1, B2 and C. In their quiet setting, they worked directly with the LST teacher and the researcher who oversaw the delivery of the program by observing on a routine basis, which consisted of two days out of four. Daily communication took place between the researcher and the LST teacher. Both analyzed data as it became available and communicated the results with parents and individual homeroom teachers. It should be noted that SRA’s Corrective Reading Decoding programs have features that have been demonstrated through research studies to be effective in improving student performance.

The SRA Corrective Reading Series is built on the basis of Direct Instruction. This method incorporates several teaching techniques that are used for all students. Table 1 is a list of teaching techniques from Engelmann et al. (1995).

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direct Instruction Teaching Techniques for All Levels</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teach to mastery</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide frequent interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use individual turns diagnostically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitor all written and oral work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate and monitor amount of time needed for each task</td>
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<tr>
<td>Give plenty of specific praise</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Review practice lessons before teaching

For each lesson, the following sequence was followed:

1. Present the Word-Attack Skills exercises.
2. Award points to students for performance on the Word-Attack Skills exercises.
3. Present the Workbook Exercises.
4. Check those sections of the Workbook pages that had been assigned as independent work, and award points for performance on those activities.
5. Conduct the Individual Reading Checkouts.
6. Students’ point totals for the lesson are computed and entered in a box at the top of the Workbook lesson (Engelmann et al., 2008, p. 10).

The following illustrates the implementation of a Direct Instruction lesson using the SRA program. Modeled by the teacher, Direct Instruction uses explicit and carefully sequenced instructions. For example, in lesson 4 the teacher would say:

1. *Listen.* *We planted a seed.* (Pause.) *Seed.* *Say it.* (Signal.) *Seed.*
2. *I’ll say the first sound in the word ssseeed.* (Pause.) *sss.* *What’s the first sound?* (Signal.) *sss.* *Yes, sss.*
3. *Say the middle sound in the word ssseeed.* *Get ready.* (Signal.) *eee.*
   *Yes, eee.*
4. *Listen:* *sad.* *Say it.* (Signal.) *Sad.*
5. *I’ll say the first sound in the word sssaaaad.* (Pause.) *sss.* *What’s the first sound?* (Signal.) *sss.* *Yes, sss.*
6. *Say the middle sound in the word sssaaad. Get ready.* (Signal.) aaa.

   Yes, aaa.

7. *One of those words has the middle sound eee. I’ll say both words again: seed (Pause) sad. Which word has the middle sound eee?*

   (Signal.) Seed. *Yes, seed.* (Engelmann et al., 2008, p. 19)

All students make mistakes. These mistakes provide the teacher with valuable information about the difficulties the students are having. Knowing how to correct effectively is essential to successful teaching. With Direct Instruction, mistakes are corrected immediately.

1. You say the correct answer as soon as you hear a mistake.

2. You repeat the task that was missed. For instance, if students responded incorrectly when you pointed to s and asked *What sound?*

   You tell them the answer (step 1). *The sound is sss.* Then you repeat the task (step 2). *What sound?*

3. You return to the first task in the sequence. (If students missed the sound s, you return to the first sound in the group of sounds.)

4. You repeat the exercises until the students can perform on all tasks without a mistake (Engelmann et al., 2008, p. 12).

Prior to starting the corrective reading sessions, it was important to explain to the students that specific things were required of them. The following explains group responses and signals used.

*Group Responses:*

1. Student responses must be in unison for the SRA reading program to be effective.
2. Unison responses are as close as teachers can get to one-on-one instruction.

3. Unison responses allow for interactive instruction that keeps students engaged.

4. The repetition assures that all students get a significant number of opportunities to develop mastery (Jackson, 2010, p. 15).

*Signals the Educator Can Use:*

1. Hand drop signal.

2. Audible signal.

3. Point and touch signal.

4. Sound out signal.


**Data Collection Plan**

The intervention used was the SRA Corrective Reading program – Decoding A. Each of the 65 lessons is divided into three major parts: Word-Attack Skills, Workbook Exercises, and Individual Reading Checkouts. The reader should receive practice daily, but due to scheduling conflicts, the problem readers in this study participated 4 times per week in oral reading, with immediate feedback.

The students read word lists with information about how to pronounce various letter combinations, such as ‘th’ or ‘cl’. The students also read sentences and passages composed of words that have been taught. The sentences and passages are designed so that they are relatively easy if the student approaches words as entities that are to be analyzed according to the arrangement of letters, but difficult if the student guesses on the basis of the context or syntax of the sentence.
Together, the Mastery Tests and checkouts in the SRA Reading Series ensure that the students attain progress in reading rate and reading accuracy.

Data was collected on a daily basis as the management of the program is aided by the use of a point system. Students received points for successful performance in (a) the Word-Attack Skills, (b) the Independent Workbook Exercise, and (c) the Individual Reading Checkout.

Mastery Tests are prescriptive in the SRA Reading Series. For the purpose of this limited action research study, Mastery Tests were to be performed as designated in the Teacher’s Guide after lessons 4, 7, 10, 15 and 20. A DRA was administered at the end of the data collection period to see if the researcher was able to answer the two research questions. Table 2 gives an outline of the data collection process.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading Achievement</th>
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<tr>
<td>Students</td>
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<td>C</td>
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<td>D</td>
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<td>E</td>
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<td>F</td>
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Data Analysis

The researcher intended to find out if corrective reading sessions focused on decoding would increase reading achievement in formally identified students. The researcher also wanted to see if withdrawing students from the regular classroom to provide small group Direct Instruction would show an increase in reading achievement.

Data was obtained on a daily basis through group study and workbook tasks as there was an analysis by the teacher after each lesson. Each session ended with points being awarded for group work, workbook tasks, and checkout tests. The DRA and Mastery Tests that were administered at various intervals were a good source of data. The Mastery Tests addressed specific skills and identified the number of errors made by each student. After each Mastery Test, data was further analyzed. If the student was not successful, the teacher’s guide suggested which lessons should be reviewed. Furthermore, an unsuccessful Mastery Test meant that all data was considered in order to determine how to proceed.

Data collection tools were organized individually, not comparatively. Each student had his/her own workbook and the teacher kept the DRA and Mastery Tests in her assessment binder. The initial DRA served as a baseline. The Placement tests from the SRA program determined if students qualified to participate in Decoding A or not. The daily tasks were analyzed in students’ workbooks and the Mastery Tests determined if students could move on or if they needed to review certain lessons with the teacher. Review occurred on an individual basis or in a small group setting depending on the circumstances or the student. The final DRA was used to see if there was indeed an increase in reading achievement.
Data Validity Analysis

“The word validity is common in our everyday professional language” (Mills, 2011, p. 102). Once the intervention was well on its way, the LST teacher delivering the SRA Corrective Reading program and this researcher took the opportunity to meet with the Resource teacher at the school to review the developed data collection plan. The informed colleague was able to compare the work to her Reading Intervention for Early Success program (2003), where she delivers small group instruction to struggling young readers in the primary division. She teaches them effective decoding strategies and reading skills. The Resource teacher found the researcher’s data collection tools to be valid. First, the December 2012 Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) provided, in her opinion, a solid baseline. The Mastery Tests that were used along the way guided the study and next steps. She was in agreement that due to the short timeline of the action research, the final DRA might not show much improvement in reading achievement as more time would be needed to administer the SRA lessons in decoding. However, there was nothing the researcher could do about this factor and therefore, no changes were made to the data sources selected. The project and its schedule went ahead as planned.

The Resource teacher questioned the validity with respect to one of the identified students. Student B has a Communication: Language Impairment identification as recognized by the Ministry of Education in Ontario. As she worked very closely with him and his classroom teacher, she felt that this student was not progressing academically or socially, and had recently prepared an assessment package, hoping that he would be re-assessed by the Board Psychometrist. This student was initially identified when he was in grade one. School staff felt that a re-assessment might have him present with an
CORRECTIVE READING AND ACHIEVEMENT

identification of Mild Intellectual Disability if not Global Developmental Delay. This could perhaps skew the results. Despite his needs, Student B remained in the small group sessions and participated in the SRA Corrective Reading program. Another way to look at Student B and the way he presented was the fact that his results might inform the teacher’s and this researcher’s teaching practices.

The data collection plan was then presented to the Literacy Coach as she has a wealth of experience in reading and writing. She was very familiar with DRA and believes in research-based assessments. She felt that the final DRA would provide a solid evaluation of the students’ reading fluency. The teacher liked the inclusion of the Mastery Tests as a data source as they were administered at various intervals, addressed specific skills, and identified the number of errors made by each student.

In conclusion, both professionals agreed with the data collection sources and no changes were made at that point of the action research. The use of multiple sources of data referred to as triangulation “is generally accepted in action research circles that researchers should not rely on any single source of data, interview, observation, or instrument” (Mills 2011, p. 96).

Sample Selection

The study took place at St. Charles Catholic Elementary School located in Chelmsford, Ontario, in a low socio-economic area. The school is dual-track offering regular programming as well as French Immersion to students from Junior Kindergarten through grade 8. St. Charles is part of the Sudbury Catholic District School Board. The school has fifteen regular classrooms to include seven English and eight French Immersion. Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) test scores from the
spring of 2012 were indicative of low reading scores. This provincial assessment is administered in grades 3 and 6 and measures various learning expectations from the provincial curriculum documents in Language and Mathematics. The grade 3 test assesses skills attained in the primary division while the grade 6 test is standardized and measures learning at the end of the junior division. Prior to completing the School Improvement Plan (SIP) in the fall of 2012, staff members conducted a needs assessment. EQAO scores and June 2012 Developmental Reading Assessment results indicated that, based on the Ontario Language Curriculum, there was a definite weakness in the Reading for Meaning expectation. Staff members felt that in order to increase student achievement, basic decoding skills needed to be taught and mastered. For the past several years, the school has used the Early Success Reading Intervention program (2003) in the primary division. Until this year however, no such reading recovery program had been implemented beyond grade 3. Although budget funds were limited, the school purchased the SRA Corrective Reading (2008) in order to service students from grades 3 through 8. Individual homeroom teachers’ workloads are challenging, therefore they do not have the time to implement an additional reading intervention program above and beyond their Language curriculum. Students participate in a comprehensive literacy block to include guided and shared reading, but those requiring extra drill and practice are withdrawn by the Resource Teacher or Learning Strategies Teacher (LST).

Participants were selected by greatest need and in consultation with homeroom teachers. December 2012 DRA was used as baseline data. Placement tests from the SRA Corrective Reading Series were administered in order to determine groupings. Regardless of the grade level, students must be grouped according to students’ ability to
decode words in isolation and words in stories. It was felt that withdrawing students with similar needs to provide direct instruction focused on decoding skills would enhance student achievement. Table 3 explains how students were selected to participate in SRA.

Table 3

*Student Data that Shows Greatest Need for Intervention*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>DRA - Expected Grade-Level Reading</th>
<th>DRA – June 2012 Results</th>
<th>SRA Placement Test – Jan. 2013</th>
<th>Modified Language Program as stated in IEP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>A</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Developmental Reading Assessment is research-based and assesses student performance in the following areas of reading proficiency: reading engagement, oral reading fluency, and comprehension. The first level of the decoding programs in SRA’s Corrective Reading Series is Decoding A: Word-Attack Basics. Decoding A is designed for very poor readers grade 3 and beyond. Decoding A works effectively with students who would traditionally be identified as learning disabled. Students can be placed in either A, B1 or B2, with A being the most basic. These six students meet the expectation to participate in Series A.
In addition, Table 4 explains the participants’ grade and identification as recognized by the Ministry of Education in Ontario.

Table 4

*Student Profile*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Identification as recognized by the Ministry of Education (Ontario)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student A</td>
<td>5 Regular</td>
<td>Communication: Learning Disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student B</td>
<td>5 Regular</td>
<td>Communication: Language Impairment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student C</td>
<td>5 Regular</td>
<td>Communication: Learning Disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student D</td>
<td>5 Regular</td>
<td>Intellectual: Mild Intellectual Disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student E</td>
<td>5 French Immersion</td>
<td>Communication: Learning Disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student F</td>
<td>7 Regular</td>
<td>Intellectual: Mild Intellectual Disability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students who have Individual Education Plans (IEP) are closely monitored by special education staff, classroom teachers, and the school’s administration. For the purpose of this action research, the LST teacher worked closely with the researcher, as she was the person who delivered the curriculum. Being the school principal, the researcher’s role was that of observer. Both the researcher and the LST teacher monitored the students’ progress throughout the study.

**Ethical Considerations**

“All research studies involve ethical considerations” (Mills, 2011, p. 25). To ensure confidentiality with the study, a letter of consent was given to the parents/guardians of the six students participating in the Corrective Reading sessions. Parents were informed of the purpose of the research, and the students’ role in the study.
Students’ voluntary participation was anticipated and there was no foreseen risk to them. It was the researcher’s intent to protect the safety and well-being of all students. The researcher is a member in good standing with the Ontario College of Teachers and is bound by the *Standards of Practice*. Furthermore, “the Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession represent a vision of professional practice. At the heart of a strong and effective teaching profession is a commitment to students and their learning” (“Ontario College of Teachers,” 2013).

**Results**

The implementation of SRA Corrective Reading Series, a Direct Instruction program developed by Siegfried Engelmann et al. (2008), was the intervention used at St. Charles Catholic School in an effort to increase reading ability in the Junior and Intermediate divisions. After the initial Placement Test, six special education students qualified to participate in a small group setting with the Learning Strategies Teacher (LST). The baseline data collected was an initial Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). This was administered and the results discussed in December 2012. January 2013 saw the initial Placement Tests given to various students who experienced difficulties in reading. Of those tested, six students with similar reading deficiencies qualified to participate in Decoding A, the most basic component of the SRA Corrective Reading Series. Decoding A is appropriate for students in grades 3 through secondary school who are extremely deficient in decoding skills. These students may recognize some words but do not have adequate strategies for accurate decoding of words like *frost* and *track*. SRA contains Mastery Tests, which are all different. Mastery Test 1 was administered after lesson 4, Mastery Test 2, after lesson 7 and Mastery Test 3, after
lesson 10. Each level contains Mastery Tests, which are criterion-referenced performance measures of student reading behaviour. These measures are part of the lesson structure. They provided the teacher with detailed data on student reading performance. They also showed the students how their performance was improving as they progressed through the program. The final DRA was administered to see if there was an increase in reading achievement in the identified students who were regularly withdrawn to participate in a Direct Instruction program focused on decoding.

Findings

Table 5 displays each of the six students’ results in reading achievement. Mastery Tests were reported as a ‘P’ for Pass or ‘F’ for Fail. Students need to not get any errors to move on in the SRA Program. A letter grade of “F” means that certain lessons needed to be reviewed with the individual student. Each different Mastery Test focused on decoding the sounds presented in the previous lesson.

Table 5
Reading Achievement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>DRA</th>
<th>Placement Test</th>
<th>Mastery Test 1</th>
<th>Mastery Test 2</th>
<th>Mastery Test 3</th>
<th>DRA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>P</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
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<td>A</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

The researcher initially set out to complete the SRA Corrective Reading Program Decoding A to include 5 Mastery Tests. This is a Direct Instruction program. For many reasons that will be discussed in the Limitations section of this report, this was not possible. Only 3 Mastery Tests along with a final DRA were completed. Individual students’ results follow.

Student A: He presents as Communication: Learning Disability and struggles academically as well as socially. In all aspects of his life, he lags behind his peers. He will be re-assessed within the next school year and school staff suspects that he may be diagnosed as having a Mild Intellectual Disability. That being said, he was an active and eager participant in the corrective reading program, always aiming to please the teacher, but especially this researcher. Initially, he had 2 errors during Mastery Test 1 and needed to review lessons 3 and 4 before moving on. During Mastery Test 2, he again made 2 different errors meaning he needed to review lessons 6 and 7. He passed Mastery Test 3 on the first attempt and his DRA test showed significant growth in reading achievement. He was also very pleased with his results and he was praised for his efforts.

Student B: After his initial Placement Test, he was on the cusp of being able to participate in Decoding A. He could have easily joined a Primary group of students participating in the Early Success Reading Intervention Program (2003) with the school’s Resource teacher. However, the team felt that the small group SRA setting would be more age appropriate. It became obvious to the teacher and this researcher that he could not keep up to the SRA group. He probably should have been demitted from the small group instruction, but although he did not pass some of the Mastery Tests, he tried so
hard in each of the sessions and when asked how he was feeling about the intervention, stated that he was successful in reading. Although he is in grade 5 reading at a grade 1 level, he was pleased with himself. He passed Mastery Test 1, but failed Mastery Tests 2 and 3. Despite the teacher’s reviewing lessons 6, 7, 9 and 10 with him, he did not meet the criteria to move on. The teacher and this researcher decided that he would continue to participate in the sessions as he was happy to be an active participant and the one-on-one or small group instruction would not harm him. In fact, it could only help him in his learning. His final DRA showed no growth in reading achievement as he maintained a level 4. This student has a diagnosis of Language Impairment, but again, staff members who work closely with him feel that a re-assessment in the near future would be helpful to determine an appropriate class setting and/or programming to meet his individual needs.

*Student C:* This student missed quite a bit of school, but was able to catch up with the teacher. She passed all of her Mastery Tests on the first try. Her final DRA gave her a score of 18, which is early grade 2. Initially, she was reading at a grade 1 level, so this gain was significant.

*Student D:* Similar to Student C, this student who is awaiting a Language Assessment worked well within his small group and experienced success, passing all 3 Mastery Tests. His final DRA showed an increase from grade 1 to early grade 2 demonstrating steady growth.

*Student E:* Perhaps the most engaged of the group, this student worked very hard to master the skills presented. His parent was also pleased with his engagement, increased confidence and enthusiasm and commented to this researcher that she was happy that he
was finally getting the extra help that he needed. During the observations, this student did not take his eyes off of the teacher delivering the lessons. He paid particular attention to her commands and hand signals. He succeeded at all 3 Mastery tests and his final DRA demonstrated the biggest jump of the entire group, moving up to a grade 2 level, despite being in grade 5. It should be noted that this student had been working very diligently at home and a private tutor had been hired. His family was very involved in helping him succeed at school. The extra support from home and school may have contributed to the huge jump in reading achievement over this short timeline, moving from a level 10 DRA to level 24.

*Student F:* This student who was the oldest participant in the group, passed Mastery Tests 1 and 3, but needed to review lessons 6 and 7 to finally pass the second Mastery Test. Easily distracted, but engaged, this student did benefit from the corrective reading lessons. His final DRA showed a score of 24, which disappointed the teacher as he progressed so well during the corrective reading sessions. Unforeseen problems at home may have affected the DRA results as he was more interested in talking about his home life than completing the required DRA task. This student had developed a strong personal bond with the teacher and felt that going to her Resource room was a safe and nurturing work environment.

The data collected daily as well as the summative Developmental Reading Assessments administered demonstrated improvement in reading achievement for all but one student. Although in small increments, five of the six students showed steady growth on an upward trajectory. The implementation of the SRA Reading Series seemed to
benefit students with learning disabilities as they showed an increase in reading achievement.

The results found herein have been compared to the findings in the review of literature. While the provision of small group Direct Instruction is a costly endeavour, it has been proven to be necessary to support reading deficiencies in many instances. As students move along the grades, the achievement gap only widens if reading behaviors are not addressed and corrected. Over the last 25 years, Engelmann et al. (1999) have done a lot of research and studies on the teaching method of Direct Instruction. “The DI model is the most carefully and thoroughly tested program for teaching reading, math, writing, spelling, and thinking skills to children” (Heward, 2000, p. 272).

Limitations of Study

There are many factors that influence action research studies. SRA Corrective Reading Series is designed to be delivered 30 to 45 minutes daily. From the onset, due to limited time and human resources, the researcher and staff were only able to schedule Direct Instruction 4 times weekly. This meant that the program would go on longer than intended. The 65 lessons included in Decoding A were not all taught. While it was intended that 20 lessons would be covered, only 10 lessons were delivered during the course of the action research. Despite the established schedule, some sessions were missed. This was due to student and teacher absenteeism, and interruptions to the regular school day such as mass, winter fun day and three days of the cancellation of transportation due to inclement weather.

The Mastery Tests are designed to show progress in reading rate and reading accuracy. Before moving on to the next lesson, students had to pass the particular
Mastery Test. As not all participants experienced success the first time, the teacher had to re-teach the missed concepts. This of course took up time during the school day, time that was difficult to find. That being said, the limitation of time was the biggest obstacle. While it was anticipated that some students might become disengaged with the program, this was not an issue. Another possible factor that may have influenced the results of the final DRA is the fact that three of the six students also had private tutors to help them with their academic deficiencies. In particular, Student E had been working very diligently at home as his family was very involved in helping him succeed at school. Since only a small portion of Corrective Reading lessons were completed, actual increases in reading achievement could not be adequately measured.

**Summary and Further Research**

While the results of the SRA Corrective Reading program seem promising, further research is needed to focus on what Direct Instruction programs should be taught in schools. Also, the setting or delivery of the Direct Instruction such as small group or one-on-one should be explored. A longitudinal study of students participating in SRA over several years should be considered in order to validate these findings. A more complete study could be done with the implementation of the SRA Reading Series over the entire school district. This would allow for a larger number of struggling readers to participate.

Overall, the study answered the research questions and supported the researcher’s hypothesis. Students in the Junior and Intermediate divisions who struggled with basic decoding skills showed an improvement in reading achievement when they were withdrawn four times weekly to participate in Corrective Reading sessions. Students
with similar needs who received small group Direct Instruction showed improvement in reading achievement. The findings of this action research must be viewed cautiously.

**Action Plan**

“Action planning is also a time for reflection” (Mills, 2011, p. 160). The Research Base and Validation of SRA’s Corrective Reading Program: Making the Difference (2005) examined the effects of Corrective Reading. “Evident-based practices in the program make a meaningful difference with struggling readers that is sufficient to close the gap in reading skills” according to Marchand-Martell, Martella & Przychodzin-Havis (2013, p.1). The findings of the brief study at St. Charles Catholic School also supported the use of SRA Corrective Reading in special education. Students in the Junior and Intermediate divisions who struggled with basic decoding skills showed an improvement in word-attack skills and phonemic awareness. This happened when they were withdrawn four times weekly by the LST teacher. Direct Instruction proved to be beneficial to the problem readers. Students seemed to have a better understanding of the relationship between the arrangement of letters in a word and the pronunciation of the word.

Individual student results were shared with parents and school staff who in turn, celebrated the success of the intervention. Since school staffing is just around the corner, and cut backs to special education are anticipated, this researcher intends on sharing the results with her Superintendent of Education. The premise of the SRA Corrective Reading is based on Direct Instruction. Individual classroom teachers are unable to effectively deliver such a prescriptive program to their struggling students. This means that the responsibility lies within the hands of the special education teachers at each
school. Cutting their specialized positions would eliminate one-to-one or small group instruction based on needs. It is imperative that the central district office recognizes the importance of Direct Instruction and its role on student engagement and increased academic achievement.

Immediate school plans include the continuation of the SRA Corrective Reading Decoding A until the end of June 2013. It will be recommended to the Sudbury Catholic District School Board that each school purchase the SRA program and provide training and support to special education teachers to begin next school year. It would be easy to compile data over a school year using Paradigm A+, the School Board’s central data collection system. This longitudinal study over an entire year at individual schools or the entire school district would give validity to the initial data collected herein as well as that of other researchers.

**Conclusion**

Although the Ministry of Education’s mandate to *reach every student* seems simple, achieving this goal is complex. It is through professional collaboration, sustained effort and Direct Instruction that struggling readers will become more proficient. The data from this brief study showed that the Direct Instruction approach was beneficial to students who experience difficulties in the area of reading and decoding. More specifically, Direct Instruction helped students with learning disabilities. The SRA Corrective Reading Series, which focused on decoding, benefitted struggling readers in the Junior and Intermediate divisions. Close monitoring of student progress was imperative, as the data collected informed the teacher’s next steps and practices. That
being said, the delivery of the SRA program was contingent upon specialized teachers at the school level.
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Appendix A

Parent Consent Letter

January 7, 2013

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Happy New Year! We have some exciting news with respect to your child’s progress and success in school.

Your child has been selected to participate in the SRA Corrective Reading Program with Mrs. Maxwell, our Learning Strategies Teacher (LST). This program is designed to help improve decoding skills and reading strategies. Another goal of this program is to address and rectify inconsistent reading habits.

This program will take place four times per week for approximately 30 to 40 minutes per session with groups of 4 – 6 students. Your child will be withdrawn from the regular classroom.

I am in the process of completing my Master’s in Educational Leadership at the University of New England. For my Action Research project, I will be overseeing the delivery of the SRA Corrective Reading Program at our school and am looking for your consent to have your child participate in my study. It is completely voluntary and information regarding your child will be kept strictly confidential.

Please consider signing the bottom part of this letter and return it to your child’s teacher ASAP.

As always, I encourage you to read daily with your child as not only does this good habit strengthen reading skills, it creates strong family bonds.

Should you have any questions about the SRA Corrective Reading Program or my Action Research project, please feel free to call me at 705-855-4955. I would be more than pleased to discuss with you.

Yours in Catholic Education,

Sandra St. Denis,
Principal

Child’s Name: _____________________________________

☑ I consent to have my child participate in the SRA Corrective Reading Program.
☐ I consent to have my child participate in Mrs. St. Denis’ Action Research and understand that there will be no risks posed.

Parent/Guardian Signature: ___________________________  Date: ____________