ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION PROJECT: Will Raising the Bar Result in Greater Reading Growth

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The practice of grouping students in small group guided reading based on their instructional reading levels, and then instructing them with texts that match those instructional reading levels has been universally accepted as best practice by the majority of educators, reading specialists, and interventionists as the paramount way to maximize reading growth and achievement. However, some scholars are questioning the basis of the origin of this foundational research data regarding the percentages for accuracy and comprehension recommended for the reading levels set forth in Betts’ 1946 book, *Foundations of Reading Instruction*. More recently, according to the Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010), the level of text complexity must be raised for all grade levels in order for the United States to compete internationally. For these reasons, this mixed-methods study examined the implications of student growth and achievement in NWEA pre/posttests based on the amount of time students spent reading texts in guided reading below, at, and above their instructional reading levels, along with educator perceptions. Two classrooms of 2nd grade students (n=34) were measured for one semester. To deepen the understanding of the results, data were triangulated through teacher and school leader interviews. The findings from this study indicated that students who read texts that were both higher than
their instructional reading levels and that matched their instructional reading levels achieved more reading achievement and growth. With regards to students successfully reading texts above their instructional reading level, this study also suggests that both student interests and teacher scaffolding must accompany this harder level text. Although not extensive, evidence from this study, supports the prior dyad reading and fluency research that suggests students are able to make greater gains in reading when given texts above their instructional reading level to read. Given these results, further field studies are recommended to allow for greater generalization.