

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

RUBRIC USE TO IMPROVE UNDERSTANDING OF THE MAIN IDEA
IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

By

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The purpose of this study was to explore the use of rubrics to increase understanding of the main idea in 4th-grade English language learners. A secondary purpose was to evaluate overall reading proficiency gains. The researcher administered the Adam County District Reading Assessment (A-DRA) to 4th-grade ELL students who were identified as below level in reading according to A-DRA test results in fall 2006. During a 16-week period, teachers and students were taught the components, terminology, and application of the rubric using the gradual release of instructional teaching model.

The A-DRA assessed reading comprehension and fluency through leveled reading passages. Only reading comprehension items were analyzed in this research project. The results concluded that the rubric did not have a significant effect on either individual or group reading comprehension performance. The main idea understanding did not improve as a result of using the rubric.

The findings of this study have several implications. The A-DRA is not a conclusive test to determine proficiency in main idea understanding. The test questions do not reflect the complexity of main idea understanding; proficiency is achieved with 1- to 2-sentence responses. Evaluating growth from pre- to posttesting is impossible because of possible changes in students' reading lexile level.

Additionally, reading comprehension proficiency is misleading. Students may be categorized as proficient by achieving 80% proficiency on the test but still be below grade level. The only assessment information of value is the calculated lexile growth.

Teacher understanding of the main idea was limited. Observations indicated a limited knowledge base and/or misunderstanding of the complexity of main idea. These variables impacted teacher instruction and subsequent student learning.

Teacher and student understanding of rubrics was limited. Using rubrics for student self-evaluation was not widely practiced. The application of the gradual release of instruction model to student independence was not evident.

This study shows the need for further research in ELL strategy implementation in reading comprehension and specifically with the main idea. Using the assessment of and for learning (rubrics) construct to build self-evaluation and independence is also a recommendation for increasing reading comprehension proficiency in ELL students.