

Improving Students' Abilities to Summarize and Speak Publicly

Author: Sierra Reeb, Faculty Mentor: Dr. Cheryl North, Department of Education

Abstract

The two objectives of this study were to increase students' ability to accurately summarize a text, and for students to become more proficient when presenting. These are both valuable skills necessary for student achievement. The study population consisted of 15 tenth graders from a suburban Mid-Atlantic high school who had difficulty summarizing and were identified as having poor speaking skills early in the school year when asked to present. These presentations served as the baseline data and were graded using a standardized rubric. Interventions included direct instruction, regular practice with summarizing, and increased opportunities for public speaking with extensive feedback. Using a standardized rubric, students were assessed throughout the year on their ability to summarize and speak proficiently. Baseline data was compared to subsequent data and end-point data to examine growth. The target for improvement was for students who demonstrated a base score of 1 to improve their skills to the next level, 2 to improve their skills to the next level, and 3 to maintain mastery on a similar assignment by the end of the course. Participants will be shown which instructional practices benefited students the most and how growth was measured throughout the school year.

Introduction

Early in the year all students were assessed in their speaking and writing abilities. The student population under analysis noticeably struggled with Common Core Standards CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.2 and CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.4-6. These standards deal with: being able to provide a summary of a text, and having a command over formal English, specifically being able to present information clearly, concisely, and logically for the audience, appropriate to the purpose and task. To improve students' skills in order to be college and career ready, strategies used were the use of explicit instruction on techniques to improve, and regular opportunities for students to summarize and speak in a variety of ways. Based on the interpretation of baseline data, the student learning objective is for 100% of students to demonstrate growth towards mastery.

Methods

In order to focus on improving speaking students were given multiple speaking opportunities both formal and informal, a standardized rubric was made for presentations assessing students on having eye contact with the audience, a clear voice, effective pacing, and minimal distractors. The method of assessment was shared with students and during the partner interview, the second data point, students were able to critique each others' presentation as well as get brief feedback from circulating teachers, and reflect on their own speaking. After the intervention students discussed their scores with the teacher and co-teacher and were given specific feedback.

In order to focus on improving summarizing students were given multiple opportunities to summarize, as well as a range of texts to summarize including: a nonfictional article, a chapter, a book, a poem, a song, and artwork. Instruction on how to summarize, effective ways to summarize was also given. The intervention strategy specifically had students continue to write as concisely as possible to fit the information on a post it note.

Note

Testing anxiety could have altered students performance and therefore skewed the data for the midterm scores.

Results

The student growth goal was reached based on the data collected by the midterm benchmark. Out of a total of fifteen students only five students initially demonstrated effective summarizing skills with a score of 2, with the rest of the population initially demonstrating that they needed improvement with a score of 1. By the midterm, three students demonstrated they were excellent at summarizing with a score of 3, five students demonstrated they were effective at summarizing with a score of 2, and the remainder seven students had a score of 1, demonstrating they needed work. Initially, eleven students showed they needed improvement with their speaking skills, with the remaining four students showing effective speaking skills. By the midterm, the number dropped to four students showing they needed improvement, eight students demonstrating they were effective in their speaking skills, with the remaining three student demonstrating excellent speaking skills.

Conclusion

The tenth-grade review English students initially had overall low scores in their abilities to speak and summarize texts. All of these concepts were taken from nationally aligned Common Core standards for literacy. The chosen research population was a total of fifteen English ten review students, a combination of two classes, in a suburban high school. The results of this study show that the continued practice and focused instruction combined with feedback over the course of the year drastically improved students scores in both their ability to summarize and speak publicly.

Acknowledgements

I would like to specifically thank my mentor teacher, co-teacher, department chair, principal, and my fellow English education cohorts. Without the collaborative efforts of all of these individuals, none of this would have been possible.

