The past decade has brought remarkable changes and discoveries and developments in the field of education.  Never before have there been so many changes in technology, assessments, curriculum, schedules, and student achievement. Educators are asking themselves daily "What does research say is best for student learning and achievement?" Teachers are constantly seeking ways to help students reach their fullest potential.  Educators evaluate learners, diagnose the missing concepts or holes of learning and assess students to find best strategies to reach each individual.

     As educators our job is to make sure each student receives a quality education.  Included in that requires a strong literacy program, rich in all components of reading.  After all, reading comprehension is the foundation of their future. The five elements of reading, as stated by the National Reading Panel (NRP) ( 2000) include phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension.  By the time students reach third grade most children are comfortable and familiar with their phonics rules and are applying them to decoding unknown words.  Creating readers, who can also comprehend what they are reading, regardless of what text they are reading, graduate from high school and continue their education is not just our job, it's our mission, our aim and our passion, as elementary educators.  In order to direct students to comprehend text, we must make certain they are proficient in the five areas of reading comprehension.   The only way to achieve knowledge each year is to know precisely where students' reading abilities are the first weeks they begin a new school year.  With triangulation of data, an educator can decipher "holes" in students' learning to diagnose problem areas.  Depending on the areas of deficiencies for students, educators are able to prescribe the appropriate-plan for each learner’s level.  It is necessary that all learners, especially the lowest learners be diagnosed in the areas of reading with which they need assistance and given a plan of action to help guide them to becoming the best readers possible.  This sounds like an Individualized Education Plan one would find in the area of special education.  What would happen if all educators created individualized educational plans for each of their students?  That seems like an enormous requirement for an educator, but is necessary in order for a teacher to reach each student in their classroom. The educator must know where a student is and how to continue their education making continuous progress.  To differentiate instruction, the starting point is as important to know as the end point.  Pre-assessing students is necessary to reach every learner where they are currently and where they should continue to go in the future. With this act in place every child will succeed in the classroom.  Furthermore, the goal in education is to reach 100 percent of the student population at “Proficient” or above on state mandated testing by 2012.

If a student is not achieving in the area of phonics, for example, review of where students have achieved, and instruction of new phonics skills must take place.  According to the NRP (2000) There is no one best phonics program. Different types of phonics instruction did not differ statistically from one another in studies. Therefore, phonics may be taught explicitly utilizing a variety of resources available to the educator and necessary to the learner.

     If the student is not achieving in the area of fluency, educators should look into explicitly teach fluency to students in order for them to read smoothly, comprehending what they read more efficiently.  (Herron, 2008) states "Students who are not at least moderately fluent in reading by 3rd grade are unlikely to graduate from high school" (¶. 1).  NRP (2000) suggests that fluency instruction should be taught explicitly.

      Vocabulary, the fourth component of reading is one that is easily forgotten in the classroom and not as often explicitly taught, as students get older. As students continue developing in their reading capabilities, the more words students learn. With this increase of vocabulary it is obvious that unless the students know the meanings of the words they are reading, comprehension of text will not be significant.  Vaughn and Thompson (2004) state "Oral and written vocabulary instruction is a valuable component of beginning reading because student understanding of word meanings and how words are used in text contributes significantly to general reading comprehension" (p. 74).  Students must be given new vocabulary words before reading new or different text.  These vocabulary words can be predetermined by the teacher or can be determined as the reader begins his/her reading of text and then reviewed followed by another reading.  If students cannot understand the words they are reading, they will not understand the text they are reading.

      Finally, comprehension is the piece that shows how students have understood what they have read.  Vaughn and Thompson (2004) define comprehension as "the active process of understanding text involving previous knowledge and understanding vocabulary, as well as interpreting concepts, inferring and linking ideas" (p. 98).  Student learning will take place when all five components of reading are mastered.  "What appears to be relatively effortless reading actually involves a series of sophisticated practices in which skills and abilities are well integrated" (p. 101).  These five components (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension) are the necessary elements to help students become comprehending readers of texts.  That is the goal educators want to achieve in students...effortless reading with comprehension of texts.

      In the previous year when pre-assessing students at the start of the third grade year, the researcher noted several who struggled with reading comprehension and more specifically with reading fluency. The students who struggled the most also scored in the bottom quartile of the NWEA, or Northwest Evaluation Assessment.  As the year progressed, the researcher noted that decoding new vocabulary words was a constant struggle.  It is in this grade level vocabulary that takes a giant leap, especially when preparing for state assessments.   These students knowledge of vocabulary was limited. During reading of passages the teacher needed to allow students to record any vocabulary words they mispronounced or didn’t know the meanings of in addition to the standard vocabulary provided by reading programs. It was a constant necessity to always question these lower scoring students to point out any words that were difficult for them. Creating a nonthreatening classroom environment was a key factor to this success, as students felt free to express what was truly challenging to them. This discovery lead the researcher to examine the question "Does individualized vocabulary instruction combined with fluency instruction increase comprehension results with below quartile readers, compared to fluency instruction alone?" The researcher added explicit vocabulary and fluency instruction to the bottom quartile learners and the results were significant for most students on post assessments that were administered in the spring semester.

During this school year (2009-1010) after pre-assessing students at the start of the third grade year, the researcher again noted students in particular who struggled with reading comprehension and more specifically with reading fluency.  The researcher added in her notes again this school year that decoding new vocabulary words was a constant struggle and these students had a limited amount of vocabulary recognition.

The 2008-2009 school year experience found the most gains were made after the teacher added individual, vocabulary instruction WITH fluency practice.  Students working with the teacher using these practices rose above the bottom quartile in May with the NWEA. These students also increased their leveled reading comprehension level by 1.5 to at least the 3.0 grade level.  Finally, all students using the explicit vocabulary and fluency scored within the top twelfth percentile on the Kansas State Assessments.  Because the needs of the bottom quartile readers in the current year's class (2009-10), were similar to the needs of the bottom quartile readers of the past year, the researcher opted to examine whether or not the research in the past year would be effective during a second year with twice as many candidates.  The researcher chose to examine the same question once again, forming a replicated study examining - "Does vocabulary instruction combined with fluency instruction increase comprehension results with third grade students scoring below the 25th percentile?"