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**Effects of Explicit Small Group Instruction to Increase Phonological  
Awareness in First Grade Students**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This action research study consisted of both qualitative and quantitative data. It explored the observed and reported experiences of “How does small group explicit instruction influence and/or increase phonological awareness?” Through the use of small group and explicit instruction, students were able to receive extra support in a first grade classroom.

The participants were seven students who were considered at-risk when using a universal screener called Dibels Next, a diagnostic phonics survey, and teacher observation. The study was conducted in a public school in the eastern part of Pennsylvania. The study was designed to teach phonological skills in small groups through the use of direct and explicit instruction. Using structured routines and placing students in small groups, students were able to effectively use sound boxes to increase their phonemic awareness. It was also designed in hopes to create student-teacher relationships and more positive feelings about reading in both whole group and small group.

The students met in small groups daily to practice phonemic warm-ups and manipulate sounds in words using sound boxes. Students were then able to build off these phonemic skills and begin working with letter-sound correspondence. Repetition and independent practice were essential for students to begin to learn how to segment sounds in words. Students became engaged in this process of using sound boxes and were discovering how to connect sounds to print.

The collection of data consisted of a double entry journal, timeline of data, instructional planning sheet, surveys, an oral interview, weekly formative assessments, and a pre and post achievement test. Data collected from this study suggest that students who received explicit instruction in small groups allowed students to show growth in segmenting phonemes in words. Having multiple data sources allowed for much teacher reflection and findings in my first grade classroom. The diagnostic survey, weekly assessments, and end of study achievement test, showed increased scores in phonological awareness. These were recorded in three separate places to ensure I had sufficient amounts of documentation. The double entry journal, timeline of data, and instructional places were records that accurately recorded phonological results. Surveys and their interview results showed more positive feelings and less negative by the end of the study. Through this research, I hope to continue to provide direct instruction in small groups to increase phonological awareness and positive self-efficacy in first grade at-risk students.

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## **RESEARCHER STANCE**

As a learner, I was known as the quiet learner who was complacent with rule following. Organizational skills were always high on my list of priorities. I can recall sitting in class and keeping a neatly organized desk area so I was ready to learn. I was also adamant about keeping a homework book that listed what I needed to do. My parents were always impressed at how well I kept track of school assignments. Each day I would place my most important “big projects” on the top of my “to do” list and plan out a week or so in advance. Every morning I created a “to do” list in my classroom. This organizational tool and checklist allowed me to feel prepared while starting my day. I also planned ahead as much as I can so that I always feel prepared to do my job effectively and to the best of my ability.

What led me into teaching was my love and passion for school. When getting ready to go off to college, my main focus was getting the best I could out of my educational experience. I challenged myself to always put school first and put the best effort into everything. I applied myself all the way through Moravian’s undergraduate program. Spending hours in the library to prepare for exams or making supplemental materials for student teaching was always a priority to me. After graduating, I knew I was ready to go out in the real world searching for the job of my dreams - educating children.

Some challenges that arise throughout my day as a teacher were meeting the basic needs of students, teaching organizational and leadership skills in young

children, and experiencing lower student achievement in literacy. Meeting the basic needs of students is a high priority of mine as a compassionate teacher. Teaching at a Title 1 school has made me realize some students come into school only looking for a safe, welcoming environment and learning new topics may not be at the top of their priority list. Many students come in less ready to learn and begin their school day unable to focus because of things outside of their control. Often students come in with incomplete work and their physical needs unmet.

Having high expectations in my classroom has allowed students to learn the school readiness skills needed to succeed in school. Students have systematic routines that are followed each day. Students are taught about leadership in my first grade classroom. Leadership has taught them much responsibility and organization to prepare them best to learn. Lastly, the challenge of getting all students to read by third grade has been a district-wide initiative. We are being trained in the area of phonological awareness in hopes of getting more students reading on grade level. We also adopted a new reading curriculum, Wonders by McGraw-Hill, in hopes to instill these systematic teaching routines into our everyday classroom.

Students are receiving more direct, explicit instruction in small groups through phonemic awareness and phonic lessons. They are also receiving much more repetition of skills in the area of phonological awareness. This has helped students increase scores in all areas in literacy. These small steps we are making as a district, school,

and myself as a teacher, have helped bridge the gap of challenges in students reading below grade level.

Although you cannot always predict a day in the life of an educator, consistency in my classroom is essential. Some more challenges that may arise are time constraints, lack of consistency when schedule changes arise, and the ins and outs of students being pulled due to other services. Another issue that may occur is students may need more time on a particular topic, but you are told you must move on to the next topic in order to cover grade-level expectations. As stated in Ainsworth, “Pacing guides help educators ensure that all students learn all of the grade’s priority standards in the right order using sequenced implantation” (Ainsworth, 2010, p. 79). I look forward to pacing guides each year because it allows me to keep the end goal in mind. It also helps attain higher achievement in students because we are explicitly teaching skills based on our curriculum.

Through district initiatives and trainings, I was able to narrow down a topic that focused on phonological awareness with struggling students. My district held trainings throughout the school year to better our instruction. I was eager to begin my action research topic on using explicit instruction in small groups to enhance phonological awareness in my struggling readers.

The end goal of my action research was to see an increase of phonological awareness skills within my classroom based on my research question and the action research that I do. I had hoped to do this by answering my research question: “How

does small group explicit instruction influence and/or increase phonological awareness in first grade students?’

I feel students learn best by celebrating successes, big or small. Celebrating student success is also one key motivational piece I value in my classroom. Each learner is different and unique. We must recognize these differences and show students how to value what they have. I can also recall having this in many of my classrooms as I grew up. Going to a private school allowed me to have small class sizes and get to know students on a personal level. This was a very important goal as a first grade teacher. My positive educational experiences growing up, along with the emphasis on education my parents instilled in me, helped shape me into the educator I am today. I hope I have as big of an impact on my students as many educators had on me. I also value the professionals I work with at a larger elementary school, but especially my principal who has always supported my desire to pursue my Reading Specialist degree.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

According to Cassidy, Valadez, and Garrett (2010), the National Reading Panel identified phonemic awareness and phonics as two of the five pillars of reading instruction that much research supports essential for children learning to read. One major pillar, although not a popular trend today compared to vocabulary, is phonemic awareness. Phonemic awareness is often a later predictor of reading for students. Students who struggle with manipulating and hearing sounds in words may be lacking the foundational skills needed to begin to decode. These phonemic awareness and phonic skills are the foundation needed to learn to read and write. It is important to assess each student using assessments that can help identify the phonological skills they are lacking. Those who struggle in this area may be considered at-risk in their classroom.

### **At-Risk Students**

In a study by Ryder, Tunmer, and Greaney (2007) they classified at-risk students as students with the lowest test scores in their age group. These students were identified by their teacher as struggling readers and were assigned to the lowest reading group. These at-risk students were assigned to two groups. A control group with low achievement scores on an initial test received no interventions. An intervention group of students was also made and received intervention from a teacher aide four times a week in the area of phonological awareness. At-risk students were considered below level due to scores on initial

testing using the Burt Test and Neale Accuracy subtest. The intervention was initiated after no success with the Reading Recovery program in their New Zealand school. Students who did not need these interventions were not exposed to these explicit phonemic awareness interventions. Results showed that gains were made by both control and intervention groups; however, the intervention group showed more growth.

In another study done by Keesey, Konrad, and Joseph (2015), at-risk students were identified through multiple measures. First they looked at scores from the AIMS web Kindergarten assessment in the areas of Phonemic Segmentation Fluency (PSF) and Nonsense Words Fluency (NSF). Students who scored at or below the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile in these areas were considered at-risk for this study. Another criterion used was if students were unable to segment vowel consonant (VC) and consonant vowel consonant (CVC) words. After the selection of these at-risk students, word box instruction was used as an intervention. This intervention caused an increase in phoneme segmentation, letter-sound correspondence, and spelling skills for those at-risk students.

In a study by Bailet, Repper, Murphy, Piasta, and Greeley (2011), they also support using an approach similar to the Tier model that is known as Response to Intervention (RTI). Bailet, et al. stated, “the core purpose of the RTI approach is to monitor objectively the progress of all students on key academic and behavioral indicators in the regular classroom and provide more intensive,

timely instruction for students demonstrating risk” (p.134). Tier 1 students received curriculum in the regular classroom but often could be enriched through other literacy experiences. Tier 2 and Tier 3 students received more intensive services that go beyond curriculum expectations in hopes to close the gaps impeding their learning. Although results did not show significant differences in each student, it supported the continuum of phonological awareness in students. This supports the idea that phonological skills develop throughout childhood.

### **Background Knowledge Phonemic Awareness**

In an article written by Cassidy, Valadez, and Garret (2010), they look at the five pillars of literacy instruction. The five pillars of literacy instruction are phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The National Reading Panel identified phonemic awareness, as one of the five pillars of reading instruction that is essential for children to learn to read. Phonemic awareness allows students to hear, identify, and manipulate phonemes (sounds) in words. Phonemic awareness is just one pillar of reading instruction along with, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

Students who struggle with manipulating and hearing sounds in words may be lacking the foundational skills needed to begin to decode. Phonemic awareness and phonics should occur in the earliest stages of development. Decoding, word recognition, and sound spelling are all areas of phonics. Phonic skills help students understand there is a relationship between phonemes (sounds)

and graphemes (letters) in words. Essentially both phonemic awareness and phonic skills are the foundation needed to learn to read and write.

Yopp (1992) classified phonemic awareness as “an understanding of speech that is composed of series of individual sounds” (p.696). Phonemic awareness tasks require students to manipulate sounds in words and focus on units of speech rather than meaning. Yopp also supports the idea that there is a relationship between phonemic awareness and learning to read. Students should have some level of phonemic awareness in order to increase their awareness of language and be able to learn how to read.

In a later study, Yopp and Yopp (2010) defined phonemic awareness as “the awareness that speech consists of a sequence of sounds, specifically phonemes, which are the smallest unit of sounds that makes a difference in one’s communication” (p. 130). Students who are able to identify phonemes are more likely to become readers. As described by both these researchers, the term phonological awareness is, “the larger context and one aspect of phonemic awareness. The students’ ability to recognize rhyme words, count syllables, and separate parts of words” (p.130). Those who lack some of these skills may need more exposure to explicit phonological skills taught during a small group lesson.

### **Explicit Instruction**

Explicit instruction was also a key term explored by Ryder, Tunmer, & Greaney (2008). They explained that although students may not need repeated

experiences of explicit instruction on specific letter sound relationships and phonic rules, “students who have low levels of related reading skills will benefit from explicit and systematic instruction in orthographic patterns and word identification strategies” (p. 365).

In the study conducted by Ryder, Tunmer, & Greaney (2008), the authors examined the effects of explicit instruction on young students in the area of phonemic awareness in a whole language classroom. Sixty-four students, ages six to seven years old, participated in this study. Teachers’ explicit instruction in the area of phonemic awareness was carried out over 24 weeks. Teachers used structured lessons based on phonemic awareness and the alphabetic principle in their classrooms. Pre-and Post-tests were given to measure growth of students’ phonological skills. A two-year follow up study was also pursued to better understand the growth made by these students. The authors of the study suggested the intervention program was successful, “in achieving its primary goal of significantly improving the phonological awareness skills, decoding ability, and context-free word recognition skills of struggling readers” (Ryder, Tunmer & Greaney, p. 363). The intervention program also had positive effects on one of the other five pillars of reading instruction- reading comprehension. Results from the two-year follow up also showed that positive growth was maintained. Students were also making growth in reading connected text two years after this study. All

positive gains were made in the area of phonological awareness due to focusing on students who were considered at-risk.

Isakson, Marchand-Martella, and Martell (2011) emphasized the importance of explicit instruction when they stated, “Therefore, it becomes critical to include focused instruction on this important skill, phonological skill, early for those students who are most at risk” (p.374). They conducted a study to evaluate how the McGraw-Hill Phonemic Awareness Program affected students in pre-school with development delays. The program includes over 100 lessons that are 15 minutes in duration and include daily phonemic instruction. The skills begin with rhyming and increase to blending and manipulating phonemes. There were five children participating in the study and five students improved in the area of phonemic awareness. They gained about 16.6 initial sounds per minute from the time they took their pre-tests to the time they took their post-tests. Students also gained 27 phonemes per minute. In both initial sound fluency and phoneme segmentation all students moved out of the risk category that they were placed in during initial testing.

I believe that explicit instruction can essentially help students who are lacking skills in phonological awareness. The direct and systematic instruction given to them daily will help engage students. The structured routines and small group lessons will give these students the attention they need in the area of phonemic awareness. Phonemic awareness is just one sub group of phonological

awareness. In the next section, I will explore the importance of phonological awareness in the classroom. Phonemic awareness focuses on the sounds in each spoken word. A more broad term, phonological awareness, refers to the ability to access and build upon elements of phonemic awareness.

### **Importance of Phonological Awareness**

According to O’Leary, Cockburn, Powell, and Diamond (2010), “phonological awareness and vocabulary knowledge are among the key early childhood precursors of later reading competence” (p.187). The purpose of this study was to examine Head Start teachers’ strategies and challenges when teaching phonological awareness and vocabulary in the classroom. When interviewing the teachers they found similar techniques in teaching phonological awareness that included explicit instruction and letter knowledge. Many teachers focused on placement of lips when articulating sounds in words. They also felt learning letter identification was a prerequisite to improve phonological awareness. Teachers had various views on whether letter sounds should be taught prior, during, or after a letter name was introduced to the students. The challenges of our unique English language were also a concern for these teachers when providing instruction in phonological awareness. For example, students may struggle with sounds that are represented by multiple letters. Students may also need explicit instruction with letters like “c” or “g”, because they have both hard and soft sounds. A common theme that researchers found was that the way

students hear language is not always how they are taught. They found small group explicit instruction was an effective way to reach all learners.

Another study that linked phonemic awareness to other skills such as decoding, vocabulary, and reading comprehension was by Carlson, Jenkins, Li, and Brownell (2013). They used structural equation modeling, SEM, to determine if vocabulary and decoding are separate skills required to comprehend text. They collected data from children ranging from three to ten years old. Students were assessed on rhyming, alliteration, segment blending, letter word identification, passage comprehension, and vocabulary. Carlson, et al. (2013) concluded, “our model adds to the substantial evidence based demonstrating the critical relationship between phonemic awareness and decoding, as the effect of phonemic awareness on passage comprehension was through decoding” (p. 125). This is another example of the importance of building phonological awareness in students.

Werfel & Schuele (2012) helped us gain an understanding of the early phonological skills (e.g. segmenting, rhyming, and blending) and decoding skills in young children. Forty kindergarten students from non-public schools located in Nashville, Tennessee, were assessed using an initial test that included a letter sound subtest from Phonological Awareness and Literacy Screening. Another initial test that was used to assess their reading ability was the Word Identification Fluency Test. Spelling measures were also given three times throughout the study.

This study focused on letter sounds and the predictors of learning blends. Results showed students learned more blends at each time they were tested. “L” blends and “s” blends showed no significant difference. Final nasal blends were the most difficult to learn when compared to non-nasal blends.

### **Sound and Word Box Interventions**

In a study conducted by Alber-Morgan, Joseph, Kanotz, Rouse, and Sawyer (2016), students received interventions using word boxes. The participants were three African American first graders located in an urban setting. Data collection methods consisted of pre-assessment of CVC words consisting of each vowel. If a student was not able to read or write a word, that word was added to his or her list of unknown words. These unknown words were used throughout the study to teach the nine CVC words that were given each session. Maintenance probes were also given at the end of each session using the trained or taught CVC words from their lessons. These probes were analyzed by how many words were correct or not correct in a given three-second -time period. Criteria for each student to move to the next phase of intervention, however, did change due to some students who did not score nine out of nine correctly in a timely manner.

Although there were a limited number of subjects in this study, results showed improvement in CVC word skills for two out of three students. Furthermore, they indicated they liked using word boxes to improve their reading and writing. Lastly, all three students felt word boxes helped them become better

readers and spellers with unknown words. Moreover, researchers have found that using word boxes help students perform well above baseline levels when segmenting phonemes, making letter-sound correspondence, and spelling words (Alber-Morgan et. al, 2016).

McCarthy (2009) investigated the use of sound boxes even further by using Elkonin boxes. She suggested that when implementing these particular word boxes in the classroom, it is important to choose the right group of words. Furthermore, she suggested that students begin with hearing phonemes before applying it to alphabetic principle.

Another article connects keywords such as explicit instruction, intervention, and at-risk students. Keesey, Konard, and Joseph (2015) explored whether word boxes help to improve phonemic awareness in at-risk kindergarteners. They also were asked if they enjoyed using the word boxes during the intervention. The at-risk students were identified using multiple measures prior to the word box instruction. The 20-minute duration of the instruction used word boxes to help increase phonemic awareness, letter sound correspondence, and spelling skills. Students were instructed using nonsense words to ensure there was no memorization of words. The students were also evaluated on improvement on referenced standardized measures in the area of phonological awareness. Each participant, “maintained skills at or above intervention levels” after use of the word box instruction (Keesey, Konard, &

Joseph, 2015, p.177). Keeseey, Konard, and Joseph (2015) stated, “it was not until letter correspondence was explicitly taught that students made the gains in their letter correspondence” (p.177). This positive effect can help students feel successful in the classroom. Intentional teaching and explicit instruction helps utilize most of our class time with students to focus on the skills they are lacking.

### **Self-Efficacy**

McGeown, et al. (2015) argued that children’s reading attitudes, confidence, and attainment might relate to the enjoyment of learning to read in both lower and upper grades. The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between young readers’ attitudes, confidence, and level of enjoyment in reading using completed questionnaires. Reading attainment was also measured using a word reading assessment. Results included the feelings of learning to read through the development of students. Most research suggests reading development happens from an early age, but McGeown et. al wanted to explore both age groups. In the early schooling years, children were just beginning to decode words rather than focusing on comprehension. The researchers found that gender differences in girl’s attitudes in reading, more confidence in reading, and enjoyment to read were higher than boys. McGeown stated, “in general children’s attitudes, confidence, and enjoyment of learning to read were positively associated with their wording skill” (McGeown, 2015, p.396). “Children’s

reading confidence showed the strongest relationship with reading attainment” (p.398).

Another finding was in the area of self-efficacy, which was investigated by Yang and Wang, (2015). This study helped identify the relationship in college students among three constructs; self-efficacy, language learning strategies, and explicit strategy instruction. The three constructs were related in language learning in college students who received explicit instruction in the area of the English language. Yang and Wang also state, “Self efficacy, moreover, has a close relationship with learning strategies” (p. 37). Finding the relationship of one’s learning strategy and meeting that need as a teacher is important when instructing students. The participants of this study were placed into two groups and met with an instructor for two hours per week. Only the experimental group received explicit instruction with review material uploaded to an online account named Moodle where they could review reading and comprehension skills. The strategy instruction that was explicitly taught during the study helped students increase their level of self-efficacy of learning a new language. It also suggest that students, “who apply more strategies and have higher levels of self-efficacy, strategy instruction have a positive effect on strategy application” (Yang and Wang, p.52).

## **Conclusion**

My research question was: “How does small group explicit instruction influence and or increase phonological awareness?” Phonological awareness, explicit instruction, and at-risk students are certainly key terms in my action research. Presented above research supports the need of increased phonological skills in students who may be struggling in reading. By incorporating much scaffolding and modeling in small groups to best prepare these students for learning, it may be easier to identify, blend, and manipulate sounds in words. Students were receiving daily explicit instruction in small groups in hopes to increase phonological awareness.

Phonic skills such as decoding consonant blends and manipulating multi-syllabic words are taught throughout first and second grade. With an increase in both phonemic awareness and phonics, I hope to see students ready to begin to decode text earlier in the year of first grade. Phonological skills build upon each other and are a strong foundation for students to learn how to read. Although most students come to first grade with some knowledge of oral phonemic skills and alphabetic knowledge, others have achievement gaps. To explore phonological skills in the classroom it is important to identify the gaps in students’ reading deficits.

As part of a comprehensive or well-balanced literacy approach, explicit interventions can help increase basic literacy skills. Research supported the use of

sound boxes as an intervention. These specific phonemic awareness skills that build off each other in a hierarchy of skills that lend themselves to the strong foundation needed in phonological awareness. The repetition and deliberate teaching of these skills is essential in learners who do not acquire these skills as quickly. Students who lack this awareness and performance in reading will continue to fall behind if there is not immediate attention given. Students need the necessary systematic and explicit instruction provided when identified as at-risk.

At-risk students who receive specific instruction in a timely manner can achieve more with scaffolding from their teacher. Identifying where students are struggling through various methods can allow you to identify students who may be considered at risk. Research showed that skills were targeted during interventions when students were not meeting grade level expectations. Most studies showed increase of scores when delivered targeted and explicit instruction through interventions.

Through explicit instruction, modeling phonological instruction, and independent practice researchers lessened the achievement gap in struggling readers. Research supported the need to plan systematic routines when conducting my small group instruction in the area of phonological awareness. It is noted that phonemic awareness is quite essential in learning how to read and, in part, what predicts a child's later development in all areas of literacy. We cannot explicitly teach all students the same way in the area of phonemic awareness. Students who

progress and are ready to move on must certainly be given the opportunity to do so. Hence, why my action research project will only focus on a small group of at-risk students, which I feel need developmentally appropriate activities that encourage phonological awareness. These systematic routines and the use of sound boxes supported my research question. I hope to increase or influence the area of phonological awareness in students using explicit instruction in small groups.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

Over a period of ten weeks, I was able to meet with a group of seven students in two small groups three to five times a week. All other classroom students were working in collaborative stations. When the study began, zero students were identified with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) but, by the end of the study, one student received an IEP. Students are part of a Title I school located in the eastern part of Pennsylvania.

This small group allowed me to provide explicit instruction in the area of phonological awareness. Specific skills were addressed based on student needs that were explored during a pre-assessment and diagnostic phonics survey. Both of these assessments allowed me to see where students were in the continuum of phonological skills and address them in small group. The idea of using sound box instruction to increase phonemic awareness and phonics was explored during this small group instruction. Students gained much confidence working in my small group and showed growth. The goal of my study was to increase phonological awareness in identified struggling readers in a first grade classroom.

### **Data Sources**

#### **Double Entry**

During my research study a double entry journal was essential to keep notes and reflect on what I saw during my small group instruction. On one side I

recorded my observations and, on the other side, I recorded what this could mean. These deep reflections helped me better understand some of the patterns of behavior I was observing in small group. Hendricks supports “that field notes are kept throughout the study and may include detailed information about implementation of the intervention, participant responses, and surprising events” (Hendricks, 2012, p. 83). The observation section included direct quotes from students, patterns of behavior, and specific student errors that were occurring. I was then able to reflect on areas of my instruction and I could make adaptations for the next time I met in my small group to better my explicit instruction.

### **Timeline of Data**

The timeline of data kept both the students and myself on track throughout the study. I was able to document weekly assessment scores of each student. Targets each week allowed me to progress through skills in a sufficient amount of time. Seeing student scores on weekly assessments allowed me to adapt instruction and make accommodations for specific students in small group. If students were consistently missing letter sounds, my instruction became more intensified and specific to the group needs.

### **Instructional Planning Sheet**

Recording student scores on our phonological survey on my instructional planning sheet helped me organize students into small groups. It was important for me to group similar skill deficits in each small group. Separating into two

smaller groups among the seven students allowed me to target specific skills when teaching. Using an instructional planning sheet showed how many correct in each section of the diagnostic phonological survey. The teacher-made document that I called an instructional planning sheet showed both beginning and end of study skills that were mastered.

### **Surveys**

I administered a pre and post survey to better understand my student's confidence level and self-efficacy in the area of reading. Often I had seen students with lack of motivation and confidence in a subject they were not doing well in. Since I was working with at-risk students, I wanted to make sure this was not the case. I wanted to see which students had negative feelings towards reading in both whole group and my small group. I hoped to receive more positive feelings about reading by the end of our time together. Hendricks, (2013) stated "Students must understand that honesty and accuracy is critical to this activity" (Hendricks, p. 93). I had high hopes to see students answer with honest responses in regards to their feelings about reading.

I gave a Diagnostic Phonics Survey, which was taken from McGraw-Hill, which I was able to identify specific skills in the area of phonological skills. This information allowed me to see students who needed letter sound review, as well as having little knowledge in segmenting three to four sounds in words. I gave

this again halfway through our study to see if students made any progress in the skill area and needed change of support.

### **Interview**

I administered one oral interview halfway through our group where I asked the same two questions, “Do you think working in small groups is helping your reading?” and “What do you like about working in small groups?” These questions produced responses from students on what they liked about working with me and how they felt they were improving their reading. Results were analyzed to see if students gained any confidence or positive feelings about literacy in the classroom.

### **Achievement Tests**

Achievement tests consisted of weekly formative assessments given by the teacher. I would read three words to each student and ask them to use sound boxes to segment the phonemes in each word. No two students received the same words in hopes to see what each student could do this skill independently. All words followed the specific skill that was taught during small group instruction.

Another achievement test was given at the beginning and end of my study. This pre and post assessment test aligned directly to my small group instruction. It was a segmentation test in which students used cubes to segment sounds in words. They were given 15 words and were asked to segment them. Most words included a blend or digraph at the beginning or end of the word. I scored both weekly and

pre and post tests to see any increase or decrease of student achievement. By the end of my instruction, students were able to attach a letter correspondence to each sound in their words.

### **Procedures**

When I started the school year, I quickly began to ask myself some important questions as a first grade teacher:

- 1) Will students correctly say single syllable words?
- 2) Will students add or substitute sounds (phonemes)?
- 3) How will students isolate and pronounce initial, middle, and final sounds (phonemes)?
- 4) Will students identify common consonants, digraphs, and vowel teams?

After seeing their initial benchmark testing, reviewing some of their kindergarten report cards, and through teacher observation in my classroom, I knew which students I would like to have participate in my study. These students would be considered at risk and need intensive support. After consents were signed, students would be given the opportunity to participate in an extra small group and explicit teaching of phonological skills daily for an extra 15-30 minutes per day.

Through the power of methodology and action research, I identified tier three students using Dibles Next, a Diagnostic Phonological Survey, and teacher

observation. However, I used teacher discretion on which students worked in my group. I used teacher observations in my whole group classroom to also help identify these students. Then through a phonics survey I was able to discover which skills I would need to target in small group. Assessments helped drive my instruction by allowing me to work on specific short vowels, digraphs, consonant blends, and early decoding skills in sentences. These skills were then explored during my intervention time using word boxes and other oral phonemic awareness warm-up activities taking from my core curriculum. Using word box instruction during intervention time was effective in helping students learn to segment sounds in words.

Often in my experience in the classroom, when students are not feeling success in a subject, frustration can kick in. Lack of confidence and attainment may lead to negative effects in reading both inside and outside of the classroom. Self-efficacy in a student can be boosted with much scaffolding and positive experience in a classroom. Through building confidence in small group and increasing reading scores, my hope was to improve student self-efficacy in my struggling students. I monitored this both in my double entry journal by documenting quotes from students and giving them student surveys.

**Week 1-** Parent permission slips and student assent forms completed. Reading Survey administered and analyzed results. Pre-Assessment Core Phoneme Segmentation Test given. Students segmented sounds in words using cubes.

Teacher orally pronounced 15 words while students used the cubes to identify each sound. Students were scored based upon how many words they got correct. Teacher then gathered words from these word lists to use in instruction. Teacher also gave a further probe from Wonders Diagnostic Assessment book in which students were able to identify letters, letter sounds, CVC, and high frequency words in sentences. I pulled skills and words from this assessment to drive my instruction.

Introduce Daily Systematic Routines:

**10 mins. Daily Phonemic warm-up-**taken from Wonders by McGraw-Hill first grade's curriculum, which follows a five-day cycle rotating phonemic skills such as, identify rhyme, phoneme isolation, phoneme blending, and phoneme segmentation.

**15-20 mins. Sound Boxes-** Break into three and four student groups to work on phoneme segmentation using sound boxes. **End of week formative assessment-** I gave the students three words to manipulate using sound chips and asked them to use the sound boxes to blend words. This week I focused on short vowel words only. This was already part of their CORE instruction during the week and a reteach of skill.

**Week 2-** Students listened orally and manipulated chips to identify the amount of sounds in words. Students isolated sounds from the beginning, middle, and end of words. Students isolated and pronounced initial, medial vowel, and final sounds

(phonemes) in single syllable words. Students added or substituted individual sounds (phonemes) in one-syllable words to make new words. **End of week formative assessment-** I gave students three words to manipulate using sound chips and asked them to use the sound boxes to blend words. This week focused on words with the short a sound.

**Week 3-** Students continued to isolate and pronounce initial, medial vowel, and final sounds (phonemes) in spoken single syllable words. Students added or substituted individual sounds (phonemes) in one-syllable words to make new words. Students orally produced multi-syllabic words, including consonant blends and digraphs with the short i. **End of week formative assessment-** I gave students three words to manipulate using sound chips and asked them to use the sound boxes to blend words. Students identified three phonemes in using short i words. They were also expected to identify the middle vowel sound.

**Week 4-** Students practiced multi-syllabic words, including short a and i words with double consonants. For example, “pass” and “kiss”. Students added or substituted individual sounds (phonemes) in one-syllable words to make new words. Students orally produced multi-syllabic words, including consonant blends and digraphs with short i and short a using double consonants at the end of the words. **End of week formative assessment-** I gave students three words to manipulate using sound chips and asked them to use the sound boxes to blend words. Students identified three phoneme words using short a and i words

identifying the middle vowel.

**Week 5- Oral Interview-** Students were asked two oral questions that would relate to if they liked working in small groups and if they felt the small group was improving their reading. Students practiced multi-syllabic words, including l blends. Students received explicit instruction using short a and i words with l blends. For example, clip, flap, and black. Students added or substituted individual sounds (phonemes) in one-syllable words to make new words. **End of week formative assessment-** I gave students three words to manipulate using sound chips and asked them to use the sound boxes to blend words. Students identified three phoneme words using short a and i containing l blends.

**Week 6-** Students practiced multi-syllabic words, including short o words with three and four phonemes. These words contained digraphs and l blends. **End of week formative assessment-** I gave students three words to manipulate using sound chips and asked them to use the sound boxes to blend words. Students identified three phoneme words using short o words containing l blends and digraphs.

**Week 7-** Students practiced multi-syllabic words, including r and s blends that contain three and four phonemes. These r and s blends contained vowels a, i, and o. **End of week formative assessment-** I gave students three words to manipulate using sound chips and asked them to use the sound boxes to blend words. Students identified three to four phoneme words using r and s blends.

**Week 8-** Students practiced multi-syllabic words, including l, r, and s blends that contained three to four phonemes. This was a review week because I found students were still not mastering the skill. Students were able to blend most, but still struggled with these consonant blends at the beginning of their words. Students were still not able to write the correct letters for these blends when asked to spell these words. These l, r, and s blends contained vowels a, i, and o. **End of week formative assessment-** I gave students three words to manipulate using sound chips and asks them to use the sound boxes to blend words. Students identified three and four phoneme words using r and s blends. Students also took Wonders Diagnostic Survey to see if any students advanced in skill levels.

**Week 9-** Students practiced multi-syllabic words, including short e with three and four phonemes. These words contained digraphs and/or review of blends but all had the short e sound. **End of week formative assessment-** I gave students three words to manipulate using sound chips and asked them to use the sound boxes to blend words. Students identified three and four phoneme words using short e words.

**Week 10-** Students practiced multi-syllabic words, including short u with three and four phonemes. These words contained digraphs and/or review of blends but all had the short u sound. **End of week formative assessment-** I gave students three words to manipulate using sound chips and asked them to use the sound boxes to blend words. Identifying three and four

phoneme words using short u words. The Core Phoneme Segmentation Test was administered. Students took their pre-test the first week of instruction. I then compared scores of their post-test to see growth in students' phonological skills in the classroom. Students also completed their final survey and results were analyzed.

### **Trustworthiness**

My study needed to be reliable and provide validity throughout my research. To ensure my study met these standards I followed strict guidelines in efforts to increase my trustworthiness. Students and parents were provided with all expectations and steps of my research before, during, and after my study. All research was conducted after I was granted approval permission from Moravian College's Human Subject Internal Review Board (HSIRB).

The purpose of conducting my study allowed me to develop a deeper thinking into the minds of my students and take a form of action that I found so very prevalent in my classroom of decreasing reading scores. McNiff (2013) states, "Action research should never be perceived as only about actions, but also as about thinking, and how a particular form of thinking informs a particular form of action" (p. 19). This enabled me to ask why I should conduct this action research study and also put to use my ideas in a practical way which can be essential when conducting any action research (McNiff, 2013, p. 21).

Upon receiving approval from HSRIB, I provided my building principal, parents and guardians, and first grade students with the explanation and expectation of my study. I quickly began to communicate effectively with both my principal and parents of the students I was choosing to work with for my research. Students would use pseudonyms during the study and all documentation would be stored in a secured, locked location and destroyed at the end of my study. At any time, parents and students were allowed to terminate their participation in my research. Consent forms outlined the timeline and procedures of my small group instruction that would focus on phonological skills. I also listed the specific assessments I would use to target these skills and monitor achievement.

After being granted permission from both my principal and parents, I was ready to provide my students with specific directions on what the study included. It was important for me to provide students with details about my study so that they understood why I felt it was important to work on explicit small group instruction in my classroom. All consent forms were explained to students orally because of the age group I worked with.

Data collection methods consisted of teacher observations recorded in my double entry journal, timeline of data, instructional planning sheet, surveys, an oral interview, weekly assessments, and pre- and post-tests. I kept a double entry journal to record observations of my students and reflect on my findings. A

timeline of data allowed me to record weekly scores of achievement and see which skills I would need to target next in small group. To complete the surveys and oral interview students would be read aloud the questions about how they felt about reading both inside and outside of my small reading group. Students would complete the survey coloring in faces due to the age of the participants. I also gave these students weekly formative and phoneme segmentation assessments on segmenting three words in hopes to see an increase in achievement throughout my study. These systematic steps during my research helped to provide accurate information and increase the trustworthiness of my study. Hendricks (2013) explains, “With observations and with whom you surround your everyday practices with, we can begin the continuous study known as the action research cycle” (Hendricks, p 4). I was eager to begin this cycle of action research in my first grade classroom.

## **MY STORY**

I quickly came to the topic of my research study after my district adopted a new curriculum and I spent many hours of professional development in the area of phonological awareness. I realized that some of my students just needed more than the core curriculum and that exposure to explicit small-group instruction might help them increase their phonological skills. I wanted to start a new year in my first grade classroom prepared to target at-risk students. At-risk students often began the school year lacking foundational skills that they later need to learn to read and write.

I was eager to begin my study but I didn't want to just use one measure to select my students. First, I decided to use the Dibels Next assessment as a preliminary assessment. This assessment measures basic early literacy skills in first grade students and identifies students who may be at risk for reading difficulties. I also wanted to take a few weeks to observe, engage, and reflect on my students reading behaviors in the classroom. This would help me identify students who needed extra support in the classroom. After giving the Dibels Next as a universal screener, I could see that many of my first grade students were considered at risk. Students were considered tier three students because of their beginning scores on Dibels Next. Students were also struggling in my approaching leveled readers during my core literacy block. These students needed immediate attention in the area of phonological awareness.

Through the use of a diagnostic phonological survey, I was able to identify the missing skills students were struggling with. This phonics and decoding survey, found in my appendix, came from my McGraw-Hill, which is used during my core instruction. It allowed me to see more than just the beginning of year benchmarks provided by Dibels Next. It mapped out a continuum of skills that prepared me to see how phonological skills built upon each other. I was able to see some students didn't master identifying all of their letters and sounds. How would they be able to begin decoding and manipulating sounds if they still were unable to recognize letters and associate sounds to print? Then through much observation I was able to see which students were also not engaged when completing any reading or writing activity. These students often would have their heads down and off task when receiving literacy instruction. Providing the most support for these struggling readers became my number one goal.

I needed to start each small group with phonemic oral warm-ups and provide as much repetition and practice as possible when targeting specific skills in phonics. I took into consideration how I could target individual students even within my small group. I identified seven students from using Dibels Next, teacher observation, and through the use of the Wonders Diagnostic Phonological Survey. They participated in my small group of explicit instruction for an extra 20-30 minutes a day. However, I then broke them into two smaller groups based on student needs in both phonemic awareness and phonics.

## **Meet the Group**

After consent forms were returned, I recall sitting in my group for the first day. Some students looked excited and one even terrified. Jade, a student I met prior to first grade, was very excited to begin small group instruction. Jade often spoke about liking small group so much when it was not small group time. She would tell other students she was in Miss Erney's small group that was different than our normal small group during Core. It was something she felt pride and ownership of. Perhaps this was because of the positive student-teacher relationship we built over the summer when she attended summer school with me. Her mother had also contacted me to better understand the purpose of my study. She described how her daughter was entertained knowing I was still in school myself. She felt special that she was selected to be part of my study. We both knew, Jade's mother and I, that this little girl would benefit from more one-on-one attention from me.

A student, Ken, who looked scared and worried about what he should do in the group seemed to better understand the purpose of our group even after the first day. He watched as I modeled a warm-up and how to use the sound boxes. He left that day with a smile and I knew small groups were going to begin to work well in the organized chaos of first grade.

### Sound Box Instruction

I began sound box instruction by giving students a word, and then having them push a chip into each box to represent each sound. All students responded well the first day as I modeled pushing sound chips down and stretching their sounds (see Figure 4.1). This would be a routine we would engage in daily and the students were eager to use the sound box instruction because they were so hands on. The sound boxes would allow students to segment sounds using chips as a manipulative. This would, in time, enhance their phonemic awareness when asked to segment the sounds in words. Students at this time were less successful segmenting words that had more than three sounds in a word. This was evident to me from their beginning of study Core Segmentation Test and teacher observation.

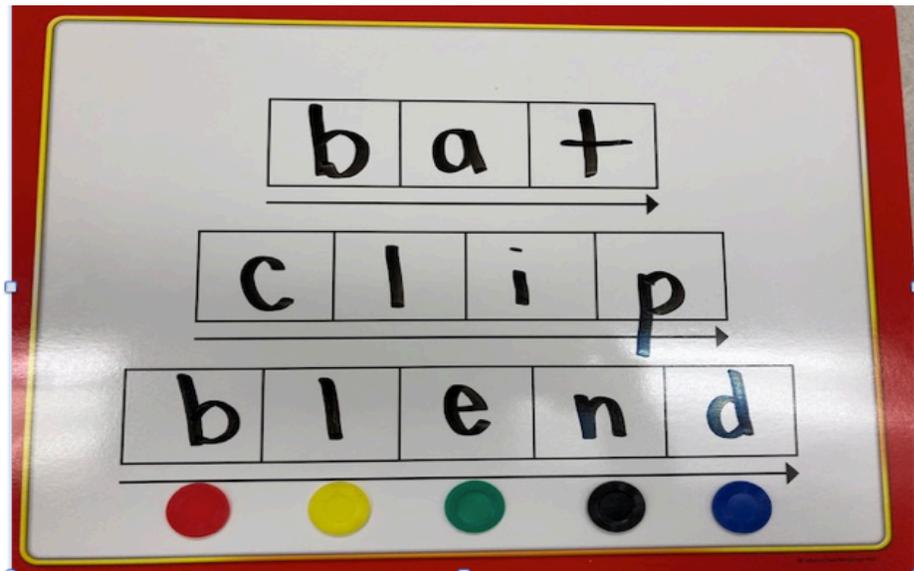


Figure 4.1 Sound Boxes

Sound boxes were a great tool to begin the process of learning how to read. Sound boxes helped students hear the sounds in words by separating the phonemes in parts. Students were then able to hear, manipulate, and identify how many sounds were in each word. Hearing phonemes before applying it to the alphabetic principle allowed students to develop a stronger foundation in phonological awareness. By adding the sound box instruction as part of their small group, it allowed them to add a new learning style through kinesthetic movement. Students heard the sounds first and began to slowly pull apart the sounds and, before they knew it, they were segmenting.

### **Beginning Data**

When the first week of surveys and data collection was done, I realized all students struggled with words that comprised of four to five sounds. They did not separate words that had digraphs or consonant blends at the beginning or end of words. Scores on the beginning Core Phoneme Segmentation Test were Jade, 6 out of 15 correct, Ken, 0 out of 15 correct, and Jay, 4 out of 15 correct from group one. In group two, scores consisted of Jane, 6 out 15 correct, Kane, 7 out of 15 correct, Lilly, 4 out of 15 correct, and Kylie, 4 out of 15 correct. All students would need support in the area of segmenting sounds in words. They all scored below fifty percent correct.

During small group, I quickly realized Ken continued to say the vowel sound /o/ in most words because he didn't know all of his vowels. He

was unable to identify the correct position of sounds in words. I would use the sound box specifically to show him where each sound was placed and would also represent graphemes to the sounds. He often was placing the /p/ or /s/ sound at the end of most of his words. This repeated behavior was identified when he took his diagnostic survey from our Wonders curriculum and through our weekly observations documented in my double entry journal. I was also able to see he only knew one out of five vowels. His beginning of year diagnostic survey also showed 10 out of 26 correct letter names and 2 out of 26 correct letter sounds. Only knowing the short vowel o, I knew he would be a main character in my research story.

Results on his beginning of study segmentation test (see Figure 4.2) were very concerning to me and I wanted to better comprehend this child's understanding on the phonological continuum. You can see his lack of ability to segment sounds in words. He missed all but one beginning diagraph or blend at the beginning of his words. He most often put in the /o/ sound in words. We needed work on all vowel sounds, segmenting blends and digraphs, and separating phonemes correctly. Quickly after Ken's first week, he learned the short a sound and segmented several words on his own using the short a sound. His response during small group that week showed me he wanted to learn, "Yes I know it," after taking our weekly assessment.

## CORE Phoneme Segmentation Test

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Grade 1<sup>st</sup> Date 9/13

Directions: Have students use different-colored blocks to show the number of phonemes in each of the Practice Items. Then administer the test. Mark "+" to indicate a correct response or "-" to indicate an incorrect response. Record students' exact responses on the blank lines.

Practice Items: sit (s-i-t); shop (sh-o-p)

- |                       |     |   |                |
|-----------------------|-----|---|----------------|
| 1. thumb (th-u-m)     | (+) | ⓪ | <u>C-U-f</u>   |
| 2. skate (s-k-ā-t)    | (+) | ⓪ | <u>K-a-s</u>   |
| 3. shriek (sh-r-ē-k)  | (+) | ⓪ | <u>sh-o-th</u> |
| 4. large (l-ar-j)     | (+) | ⓪ | <u>C-o-sh</u>  |
| 5. drop (d-r-o-p)     | (+) | ⓪ | <u>C-o-p</u>   |
| 6. flew (f-l-oo)      | (+) | ⓪ | <u>f-o</u>     |
| 7. chalk (ch-au-k)    | (+) | ⓪ | <u>C-au-f</u>  |
| 8. germ (j-er-m)      | (+) | ⓪ | <u>S-c-p</u>   |
| 9. spread (s-p-r-e-d) | (+) | ⓪ | <u>C-o-f</u>   |
| 10. train (t-r-ā-n)   | (+) | ⓪ | <u>P-</u>      |
| 11. stork (s-t-or-k)  | (+) | ⓪ | <u>th-o-p</u>  |
| 12. bolt (b-ō-l-t)    | (+) | ⓪ | <u>p-s-c</u>   |
| 13. glare (g-l-air)   | (+) | ⓪ | <u>S-o-p</u>   |
| 14. crowd (k-r-ou-d)  | (+) | ⓪ | <u>C-ou-f</u>  |
| 15. point (p-oi-n-t)  | (+) | ⓪ | <u>p-o-f</u>   |

Items Correct 0/15

**Figure 4. 2 Ken's Beginning of Study Phoneme Segmentation Test**

This formative assessment would be given each week after a week of intense direct instruction. Students would be asked to segment three words each week. I would record this data for all seven students throughout my study. Also keeping a log of specific words and the patterns I saw was essential when

exploring repeated behaviors. Explicit, direct instruction was an effective tool for a student who lacked the foundational background in letter sounds. I would record this data for all seven students throughout my study. Also keeping a log of specific words and the patterns I saw was essential when exploring repeated behaviors.

Jade also continued to show enthusiasm that first week asking every day “Are we coming to your group today?” Her beginning of year diagnostic showed me she only knew 20 out of 26 letter names and 22 out of 26 letter sounds. However, her vowels were all identified correctly during this survey. Only one other student, Jay, also missed letter names and sounds on this diagnostic survey. He too needed support in vowel practice like Ken. He knew 26 out of 26 in letter identification, and 21 out of 26 in letter sounds. He only identified two out of five vowels at that time. Jade, Ken, and Jay would fit nicely in one small group during our small group time. These students would be placed in my first small group during my study.

### **Systematic Routines**

I would begin each small group with the same routine in both group one and group two. Students would complete a phonemic awareness warm up in which they were only listening and manipulating sounds orally. I would then model several examples of the new skill I would be teaching during small group for that day. For example, in early weeks, I would focus on short vowels, blends,

and digraphs segmenting these sounds in words using the sound boxes. Students would practice several examples with me before being allowed to practice independently. During their independent practice time, I could hone in on specific students who needed support. Group one needed much more support with letter and letter sounds when asked to manipulate words that contained blends and digraphs. Group two moved quicker in response to this small group instruction from the beginning of our group. They were able to apply sounds to print by the middle of my study.

### **Small Group One**

During weeks one through four, Jade was seen a few times off task and producing the wrong ending sounds; /n/ for /m/ were confusing her. I was shocked because I have not seen this off-task behavior when first beginning our small group. After some reflecting and some more one-on-one attention from myself, in no time she was much more focused in the group. I could see this during her weekly assessments when she was correctly producing at least two or three out of three words correct. I needed to focus on getting the other two students in her group to segment correctly when given three words each week. I was always looking for ways to change, adapt, or intensify my instruction throughout this process.

I often observed Jay saying wrong ending sounds even during our warm-up because of how quickly he wanted to respond. I knew I would need to teach

him to slow down his thinking before making up sound symbol connections when decoding. The word “impulsive” often came to mind whenever asking him to participate in the group. I explained to him he was not always up against a clock and we needed to take our time when touching and saying sounds in words. This strategy was one all students in this group practiced because of their lack of beginning letter sounds.

Ken had now been referred for further testing by his kindergarten teacher to our school psychologist by the middle of our study. Only a few sounds were familiar to this student. He did not retain as much instruction from kindergarten as the other students. His kindergarten teacher along, with parent support, recommended the testing process began. Often the sounds /c/, /p/, /t/, and /s/ were familiar to the student, so he placed these sounds in most words due to the familiarity of these sounds. When asked to segment words that did not contain those sounds, I often found myself recording those letters. He also did not know all of the correct sounds in his name. I continued to spend more time with this student in small group and encouraged him to use sound boxes to help him as he heard the sounds in words.

### **Small Group Two**

My second group consisted of Jane, Kane, Lilly, and Kylie, because they had mastered all letter names and sounds. This again was identified using the beginning diagnostic survey. From this survey, I knew they were ready to begin

manipulating, blending, and decoding in my small group. Jane was a quiet student who quickly showed her confidence in segmenting words after week one. She showed leadership in the group when she quickly began helping other students who just needed more time to pick up on segmenting, blending, and even decoding. I knew this group would be ready for some phonic lessons in no time. I was eager to begin matching the sound symbol with this group when I felt they were ready by week five.

Kane was a student who needed teacher prompts to begin any assignment. She responded well with the structured routines of my lessons and pacing of our small group. Small groups allowed for explicit and direct instruction. She began segmenting more words correctly after the beginning weeks. However, I was sad to see towards the middle of group sessions some poor behavioral changes. Her scores dropped only during weekly assessments and I felt her focus was elsewhere. She needed more reminders to get back on task and spend less time worrying about what other students were doing in the classroom. On my double entry journal by week four and five, I noted several instances that she was inconsistent. She was able and very capable, but just needed to be more motivated and apply herself to learning.

Lilly was an energetic student who also enjoyed small group but sitting in our small group was no easy task. She always had an assigned seat right next to me to enhance her on-task behavior. Sitting still was not an easy task especially

during independent practice time. I would need to sit closer so she was able to practice her words. She often needed one-on-one attention when using the sound chips because she would push them on the floor in the group. However, her segmenting scores increased as well in both weekly and on end of study assessments.

Kylie often missed a phoneme in any words that contained s blends. This was a skill we covered during whole group in my first grade classroom. I knew she needed more explicit instruction and repeated practice with blends. This was something I incorporated into warm ups. I would have us warm up by segmenting words with blends and using our fingers as we tapped the sounds and pulled them back together. I even incorporated one blend in the “you do” when learning a new skill. During a small group a “you do” was when students were asked to apply a skill I modeled and practiced with each student. At the end of the week, I also used this as a formative assessment in which each student was given three different words to segment independently “you do”. I could see by the end of the week she was able to feel more comfortable with blends along with other members in her group. This group was making quicker progress than group one and I was ready to continue to push them.

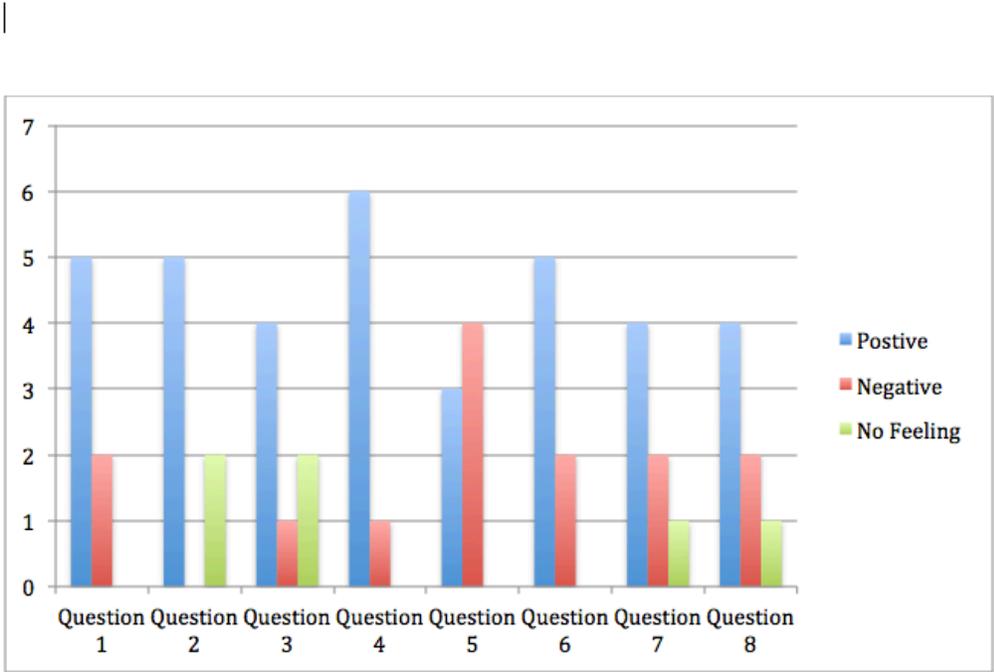
### **How Do They Really Feel?**

Surveys and interviews were complete after this first week and I was saddened to see negative feelings toward reading in both whole group and small

group (See Figure 4.3). I knew students were indeed familiar with these terms “whole group vs. small group” because we had recently practiced our transitions the first few weeks of school. Students were asked to practice transitioning from whole group to small group and back to whole group when I would a ring a bell. This would help my time on task for academic learning.

**Beginning of Study**

**Reading Feeling Survey**



**Figure 4.3 Beginning of Study Reading Survey Results**

In the beginning survey, four out of seven students responded on their survey that they liked when they were not reading in school. Each bar represented in the graph above showed a feeling of reading attainment. The first bar showed positive responses to each question. The second bar showed negative responses to

each question. Lastly, the third bar showed neither positive nor negative feelings when responding to a question.

Two out of seven students felt terrible or awful when asked to read in small group. Even in small group it seemed they had negative feelings toward the pressure of being asked to read. All students, however, did not feel they were doing anything below okay, good, and awesome in reading right now. So even though these students who were now identified as my at-risk students, they did not feel they were struggling in the area of reading.

### **Halfway There**

When conducting an oral interview during week five, students were eager to answer that they all like something about small group instruction. All students but one felt like they were getting better in reading. Positive responses from most of my group warmed my heart and I knew my small group was effective. All surveys and interviews about student confidence and reading attainment were given one-on-one in the morning prior to their small group. Students were given a sentence starter to complete during my oral interview: “I like working in small groups because\_\_\_\_,” and “Do you think you are getting better?” “Why?”

Teacher- posed questions and prompts helped students organize their thinking when asked to respond to my questions. What surprised me most was when students did not feel that they were struggling in reading compared to other students in the classroom on their reading survey. These at-risk students did not

feel any different at the beginning of my study when compared to the rest of the readers in my class; however, students by the middle of the study certainly had positive things to speak about saying they were now “getting those hard words correct”.

During the oral interview, Jade responded with, “I like working in groups because I am sounding out my own words”. “I’m REALLY (said in an excited voice) getting better because I am getting those tricky words.” Jay responded, “I like working in small groups because I like to work”. “Yes I like it, it’s fun”. Ken replied, “I like learning” and “Yes” (see Figure 4.4).

Ken’s response was no surprise when understanding he had mixed emotions about reading. He was very short when responding orally during his interview, which surprised me because he was starting to speak up more in the group. On his reading survey he had the most negative feelings when compared to other students in our small group, but orally he told me he liked it. He aims to please me often in the classroom. He was always putting in 110 percent effort. So moving forward I was determined to increase positive feelings about reading with my group of students by providing them extra attention in small group.

<b>Student Responses:</b>
Jade- "I like working in groups because I am sounding out my in words. "I'm REALLY (said an excited voice) getting better because I am getting those tricky words."
Jane- I like working in small groups because I like reading. "Yes I'm better because I can sound words".
Jay--"I like working in small group because I like to work". "Yes I like it, it's fun"
Lilly-"I like to do work" Yes cuz (because) I'm quiet"
Kylie-"I like making sounds in my words" "No, because its hard I know words when I read".
Kane- "I like reading words" "Yes, because I'm getting more words right".
Ken-"I like learning" "Yes."

**Figure 4.4 Student Responses during Oral Interview**

### **Small Moments Make Big Successes**

By week six, Ken was able to identify three phonemes in a word during independent practice time. Jade shouts out, "Miss Erney, I am getting good at sounding at my words." "I know it", /s/ /l/ /i/ /p/ it's slip," shouted Lilly.

Jay and Ken were raising their hands to go first several times during group.

Confidence levels were rising and hard work was paying off. Each week I continued to assess students on three words based on that week's focus skill and independent practice.

On weekly assessments that were logged in both my double entry and timeline of data documents, Ken was now getting at least one word correct out of three when asked to blend phonemes. This led me to believe he was learning more of his letter sounds and identifying them in words. Other students at this time were consistently getting two and three out of three correct during each end of week assessment. My hope by the end of this study was to get more than half of my small group at least at 90% accuracy on the weekly assessment. After just four weeks of explicit instruction students, in group one had accuracy rates of 67%, 16%, and 83% accuracy when segmenting three words correctly (see Table 4.1)

**Group 1**  
**Words Read Correctly**  
**Weekly Formative Assessment**

<b>Student Name</b>	<b>Week 1 Date 9/15</b>	<b>Week 2 Date 9/22</b>	<b>Week 3 Date 9/29</b>	<b>Week 4 Date 10/6</b>
<b>Jade</b>	2/3 correct	2/3 correct	2/3 correct	2/3 correct
<b>Ken</b>	0/3 correct	1/3 correct	1/3 correct	0/3 correct
<b>Jay</b>	2/3 correct	2/3 correct	3/3 correct	3/3 correct

**Table 4.1 Group 1 Weekly Assessment Weeks 1-4**

At this time, Ken, who scored only 16% accuracy rate, received an Individual Education Plan. He would be monitored in all areas of reading, writing,

and math. The progress he made in small group exceeded all expectations for this struggling learner. Progress is being made after seeing their beginning of study phoneme segmentation test when all students scored below the 50% and segmenting less than six words correct. Seeing students score two out of three correct when asking them to independently segment words. I could see students understanding how to separate sounds in words.

Group two accuracy rates consist of 92%, 67%, 92%, and 75% when segmenting three words correctly (see Table 4.2). This group showed stronger skills in segmenting with at least two or three out of three correct each week. I was hoping to increase their accuracy rates as well when looking at their end of study formative weekly assessments.

As we progress to the second half of my study we were into blends and digraphs. These more difficult sound-spelling rules are harder for students to learn. I am even more consistent with my routines and spend more time on a longer “I do” of explicit instruction from the teacher. During this week, four out of seven students were able to write the letters for all four phonemes in the correct boxes on their sound boxes. This tells me students were now connecting sound symbol to their phonemic skills.

**Group 2**  
**Words Read Correctly**  
**Weekly Formative Assessment**

<b>Student Name</b>	<b>Week 1 Date 9/15</b>	<b>Week 2 Date 9/22</b>	<b>Week 3 Date 9/29</b>	<b>Week 4 Date 10/6</b>
Jane	3/3 correct	3/3 correct	2/3 correct	3/3 correct
Kane	2/3 correct	2/3 correct	2/3 correct	2/3 correct
Lilly	2/3 correct	3/3 correct	3/3 correct	3/3 correct
Kylie	2/3 correct	2/3 correct	2/3 correct	3/3 correct

**Table 4.2 Group 2 Weekly Assessments Weeks 1-4**

Even Ken, who showed some trouble during this time, only needed some peer and teacher support with missing vowels. He also was better with beginning and ending sounds. Six out of these seven students were also raising their hands during whole group instruction. This observation was noted after much reflection on the beginning of the year. These students were now willing to participate in the classroom.

After eight weeks of explicit instruction, students in group one have accuracy rates on their weekly formative assessment of segmenting three words correct were 100%, 58%, and 83% accurate when segmenting three whole words (see Table 4.3). Jade identified 12/12 words read correctly after eight weeks of

small group explicit instruction showing 100% accuracy. Ken identified 7/12 words read correctly after eight weeks of small group explicit instruction showing 58% accuracy. Jay identified 10/12 words read correctly after eight weeks of small group explicit instruction showing 83% accuracy.

<b>Student Name</b>	<b>Week 6 Date 10/20</b>	<b>Week 6 Date 10/27</b>	<b>Week 7 Date 11/2</b>	<b>Week 8 Date 11/10</b>
<b>Jade</b>	3/3 correct	3/3 correct	3/3 correct	3/3 correct
<b>Ken</b>	1/3 correct	1/3 correct	2/3 correct	3/3 correct
<b>Jay</b>	3/3 correct	3/3 correct	1/3 correct	3/3 correct

**Table 4.3 Group 1 Weekly Assessment Weeks 5-8**

Group two accuracy rates consist of 100%, 75%, 75%, and 75% when segmenting three words correctly (see Table 4.4). This tells me that in the group one, two out of three students increased their accuracy rate with one student staying the same. Two out of four students in the group two increased and one student went down in accuracy, while the last student in that group also stayed the same. I looked at some behavioral concerns with her scores that went down and suggested this student begin to meet with a reading specialist who supports during core instruction. I also made sure explicit instruction was still my main focus in

small group. These were students I knew I would need to spend more attention on during small group and time after my intervention study. I considered how skills were getting harder and much more repetition was needed. These groups continued to be monitored and seen in small groups. I would incorporate a segmenting warm-up in my core, small groups, and intervention groups.

<b>Student Name</b>	<b>Week 5 Date 10/22</b>	<b>Week 6 Date 10/27</b>	<b>Week 7 Date 11/2</b>	<b>Week 8 Date 11/10</b>
Jane	3/3	3/3	3/3	3/3
Kane	2/3	2/3	3/3	2/3
Lilly	2/3	2/3	3/3	2/3
Kylie	2/3	2/3	2/3	3/3

**Table 4.4 Group 2 Weekly Assessment Weeks 5-8**

At this time I identified two positives; students were enjoying their one-on-one teacher attention, and peer support often helped students gain more confidence in my group.

### **Teacher Insights**

After the first half of my study, some teacher observations stood out. I saw students in both groups who were not consistent and also students who could accurately segment during our end of week assessment but were not applying these skills in reading text. Ken was still learning more of his letter sounds and letter identification. /J/ for /g/ is common in the beginning of first grade, however,

he consistently could not identify either letter or sound. There was a need for more explicit teaching in his letter sounds and letter ids. All students by week six needed little effort to tap out the sounds using s and r blends. Reviewing that /s/ and /r/ blends make two separate sounds on Monday and doing them as our daily warm-up might give them more exposure to this skill. I even quoted myself, “Good boys and girls we will continue to practice more and more each day. I like that you all enjoy our small group during reading. I see some great improvements”. Six students seemed most confident in small group. One of these students who received the lowest scores on our beginning of study Segmentation Test participated more in group when compared to others. Structured routines were still working well. Skills were getting harder and students were making progress as identified in both my double entry journal and weekly assessments.

### **Keeping the Engagement**

Jade and Jane both spoke up in group during week eight stating, “Yes we are meeting in group!” and “Can I go with you today too?” When meeting with both groups, I explicitly stated, “We would be learning short e words with mixed blends and digraphs.” This type of teacher talk was said daily, making sure students knew exactly what skill would be modeled and practiced that day.

At the end of the study, all students were exposed to all short vowels, beginning of year blends, and common diagraphs. I wanted to now review these skills while mixing some harder skills together. I knew these students were giving

their best effort and I wanted to make sure I was supporting them during small group to feel successful.

In weeks ahead, students sat quietly waiting for the “I do” of the lesson in which I modeled several words before having students use their sound boxes with teacher support. These sound boxes were a tool that students were familiar with and used consistently to enhance their phonemic awareness. Students in both groups all raised their hands when asked who wanted to go first when giving them their “you do” of the lesson. These “I do”, “we do”, “you do” structured routines allowed the gradual release of support to help increase their phonemic awareness. I saw many students respond well with this during group. I even recorded students who were very focused and segmenting independently.

After my study, I just had one concern in mind, “What would happen when these students leave my small group and are asked to apply these skills during independent reading time?” I was determined to continue these segmenting skills even more throughout my day. The more repetition would be better with these struggling students. When lining them up or transitioning to other parts of our day, I was now incorporating these segmenting sound routines as much as possible.

### **What Really Worked**

Both groups would begin with the same phonemic oral warm-up taken from our CORE curriculum. Again repetition and systematic routines were

important when meeting in our small group. I established routines during week one and took phonemic warm-ups from my core curriculum called Wonders by McGraw Hill. Students were then taught a mini lesson on a specific vowel, blend, or digraph. Students watched as I modeled several examples before giving them independent practice. Through observations I noticed when students were beginning to learn more letter sounds. They were all also able to segment three and four sound words after much modeling and practice.

### **Progress Is Progress**

Ten weeks of targeted instruction had come and gone. Students continued to show enthusiasm in small group each day. I was now ready to give their final segmentation test. This test, Core Segmentation Assessment, was administered at the very beginning and end of my study. All students had scored below 50% on this assessment at the beginning. I was anxious to see how much progress this assessment would show because of how well the skills correlated with our group work. The expectations on this assessment linked with our everyday practice of segmenting and blending sounds in words.

The scores were in and all students showed growth in segmenting sounds in words. I felt this was an appropriate measure and assessment for this study. The words were all three to five sound words, most including a digraph or blend. Students truly needed to understand how to segment to show any growth on this type of assessment. Some of my main characters like Jade scored six out of fifteen

at the beginning and a twelve out of fifteen on her post assessment. Ken scored zero out of fifteen on his pre-assessment and five out of fifteen on his post-assessment (see Figure 4.5).

**CORE Phoneme Segmentation Test**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Grade 1<sup>st</sup> Date 11/30

Directions: Have students use different-colored blocks to show the number of phonemes in each of the Practice Items. Then administer the test. Mark "+" to indicate a correct response or "-" to indicate an incorrect response. Record students' exact responses on the blank lines.

Practice Items: sit (s-i-t); shop (sh-o-p)

1. thumb (th-u-m)	(+) (-) <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<u>f-v-m</u>
2. skate (s-k-ā-t)	(+) (-) <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<u>s-ā-t</u>
3. shriek (sh-r-ē-k)	(+) (-) <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<u>sh-r-ē-g</u>
4. large (l-ar-j)	(+) (-) <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	_____
5. drop (d-r-o-p)	(+) (-) <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	_____
6. flew (f-l-oo)	(+) (-) <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<u>f-l-e</u>
7. chalk (ch-au-k)	(+) (-) <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	_____
8. germ (j-er-m)	(+) (-) <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	_____
9. spread (s-p-r-e-d)	(+) (-) <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<u>s-r-e-d</u>
10. train (t-r-ā-n)	(+) (-) <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<u>ch-r-ā-n</u>
11. stork (s-t-or-k)	(+) (-) <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<u>s-or-k</u>
12. bolt (b-ō-l-t)	(+) (-) <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	_____
13. glare (g-l-air)	(+) (-) <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<u>g-air</u>
14. crowd (k-r-ou-d)	(+) (-) <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<u>c-ou-d</u>
15. point (p-oi-n-t)	(+) (-) <input checked="" type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	<u>p-oi-t</u>

Items Correct 5/15

Figure 4.5 Ken's End of Study Phoneme Segmentation Test

On his post assessment, Ken was able to get more vowel sounds correct and had all but two beginning sounds correct. He still struggled with words that began with digraphs and blends. He also had trouble separating vowel sounds from other consonant sounds. However, he was able to show a stronger understanding of phoneme sounds in words. I could see he was learning more letter sounds than when he first started. He was segmenting on his own, but just needed some more time and explicit instruction in words that had four to five sounds in them.

The four highest scorers on this assessment were Jane, Kane, Kylie and Lilly, which also supported my grouping between group one and group two. The highest students were in small group two and progressed quickly when applying sound to print. Kylie also had all four correct words that consisted of s blends correct when asked to segment them independently. S blends were a skill this student struggled most with during small group. For example, words such as stork or spread. Perhaps the words chosen for this assessment were targeted for higher grades, which might be why none of my students mastered this assessment. This didn't defeat me nor any of my amazing first graders who were not participating in reading activities in the classroom. I saw growth in their independent station time at the beginning of my study. Prior to my study I noted in my double entry journal, all students were off-task, unclear about the directions, and not able to work independently during stations. This was a specific time during our core, in

which students were expected to work quietly while I met with other students in small groups. All in all this progress made one proud teacher when comparing scores from both groups one and two from there pre and post Core Phoneme Segmentation Test.

Results showed that student achievement tests went up both in segmentation and positive feelings about reading through their surveys. In the next section, you can see this growth from their Core Phoneme Segmentation in the table listed and further discussed. Scores were certainly exceeding 50%. You can also see more skills were mastered on the diagnostic survey and recorded in my instructional planning sheet below (see Figure 4.6).

All students but one mastered all their letters and vowel sounds. Their continuum of phonic skills and decoding survey allowed me to see that students were all able to begin blending consonant vowel consonants (cvc) and consonant vowel consonant e (cvce) words. These skills would help students read and spell words both in isolation and in connected text. I would also need to incorporate high frequency words or known as heart words to my first graders in my future instruction. I want these students to build accuracy in decoding now that most of these students have a solid sound by sound in their responses. Students have shown me they are stronger in segmenting so continuing to push them and expose them to higher reading skills is essential for their future of learning to become fluent readers in my first grade classroom.

<b>Student Name</b>	<b>Pre 9/27 Instructional Planning Skills Number Correct/How Many Assessed</b>	<b>Post 11/8 Instructional Planning Skills Number Correct/How Many Assessed</b>
Jane	Letters- 26/26 Letter Sounds 24/26 VC/CVC Decoding 6/10 CVC Decoding (in text) 18/20	Letters- 26/26 Letter Sounds 26/26 VC/CVC Decoding 10/10 CVC Decoding (in text) 19/20
Kane	Letters- 26/26 Letter Sounds 26/26 VC/CVC Decoding 0/10 CVC Decoding (in text) 3/20	Letters- 26/26 Letter Sounds 24/26 VC/CVC Decoding 6/10 CVC Decoding (in text) 0/20
Jade	Letters- 20/26 Letter Sounds 26/26 VC/CVC Decoding 0/10 CVC Decoding (in text) 0/20	Letters- 26/26 Letter Sounds 26/26 VC/CVC Decoding 2/10 CVC Decoding (in text) 1/20
Lilly	Letters- 24/26 Letter Sounds 24/26 VC/CVC Decoding 0/10 CVC Decoding (in text)3/20	Letters- 26/26 Letter Sounds 26/26 VC/CVC Decoding 8/10 CVC Decoding (in text)17/20
Kylie	Letters- 26/26 Letter Sounds 26/26 VC/CVC Decoding 1/10 CVC Decoding (in text)12/20	Letters- 26/26 Letter Sounds 26/26 VC/CVC Decoding 8/10 CVC Decoding (in text)10/20
Ken	Letters- 10/26 Letter Sounds 6/26 VC/CVC Decoding CVC Decoding (in text)	Letters- 16/26 Letter Sounds 16/26 VC/CVC Decoding CVC Decoding (in text)
Jay	Letters- 26/26 Letter Sounds 18/26 VC/CVC Decoding 1/10 CVC Decoding (in text)3/20	Letters- 26/26 Letter Sounds 26/26 VC/CVC Decoding 6/10 CVC Decoding (in text)8/20

**Figure 4.6 Instructional Planning Sheet**

## DATA ANALYSIS

Using various forms of data to measure the phonological growth in students allowed me to see the effects of my study. Throughout the study, I used multiple data sources to record information. After information was documented and stored, I would be able to reflect and revise my teaching instruction. I was able to see growth in the area of literacy achievement and self-efficacy.

Gaining insight through the eyes of my students allowed me to connect on a personal level throughout my study with each student. Through my double entry journal and surveys I was able to see student behaviors and feelings. I feel developing a strong relationship in our small group allowed students to strive to best of their ability at all times. I also administered a weekly formative assessment based on each skill I taught weekly. I gave a pre -and post-Core Phoneme Segmentation Test that aligned with the use of sound boxes (Appendix D). These achievement tests showed an increase in scores in phonological awareness.

Sources of timeline of data (Appendix F) and instructional planning (Figure 4.6) allowed me to target specific skills for each student in my small group. If students did not pass a section on this phonological survey (Appendix E) it had marked which section of skills students lacked and I could target in small group.

The pre-and post-surveys (Appendix G) and interview (Appendix H)also allowed me to see self-efficacy and confidence in students about reading. Through

the use of multiple sources I was able to see much growth in my small group explicit instruction in the area of phonological awareness.

### **Analysis of Double Entry Journal**

The double entry journal was of significant use when writing my story. The teacher created documents of the double entry journal, timeline of data, and my reading survey allowed me to document teacher reflections, timelines of when assessments were given, student quotes, and common errors that were made among student success.

The double entry journal worked well when documenting anything about my students because I wrote direct observations but then had a section to reflect. Reflection throughout this process allowed me to make connections, scaffold instruction, and guide my direction of the study. Both student and teacher quotes were documented. These quotes allowed me to have some “aha” moments about which students were gaining confidence in the area of literacy development. It also allowed me to document specific errors students were making each time we met in small group. It motivated me to reflect on these errors and adjust my explicit teaching along the way.

The notes also allowed me to see student strengths and weaknesses. An example was all students were able to use the sound boxes independently and correctly by the end of the study. Another example was students struggled with words that were four sounds. They did not separate words that had digraphs or

consonant blends in their words. This allowed me to determine the need for continuing explicit instruction in this area segmenting words that contained four and five sounds.

### **Analysis of Timeline for Data**

Using a table to record and document a timeline for my study kept me on target (Appendix F). Each week I was able to record the skills that would be taught, words students were given as an assessment, and the dates of all surveys administered. This table allowed me to write the specific words I gave students each week, which also helped in the reflection of student errors. No two students were given the same words on their end of weekly formative assessment. However, they all followed the same skill that was previously taught. I could see consistent patterns that were occurring throughout the study when looking at my timeline for data. Some consistent patterns were students missing /k/ in the word skip and missing the /t/ in words like stock and stick. Students were missing the second sound because they were unable to identify the separate sounds in /s/ blend at the beginning. Another example error was the letter sound /j/ for /g/ in words like grass.

### **Analysis of Instructional Planning**

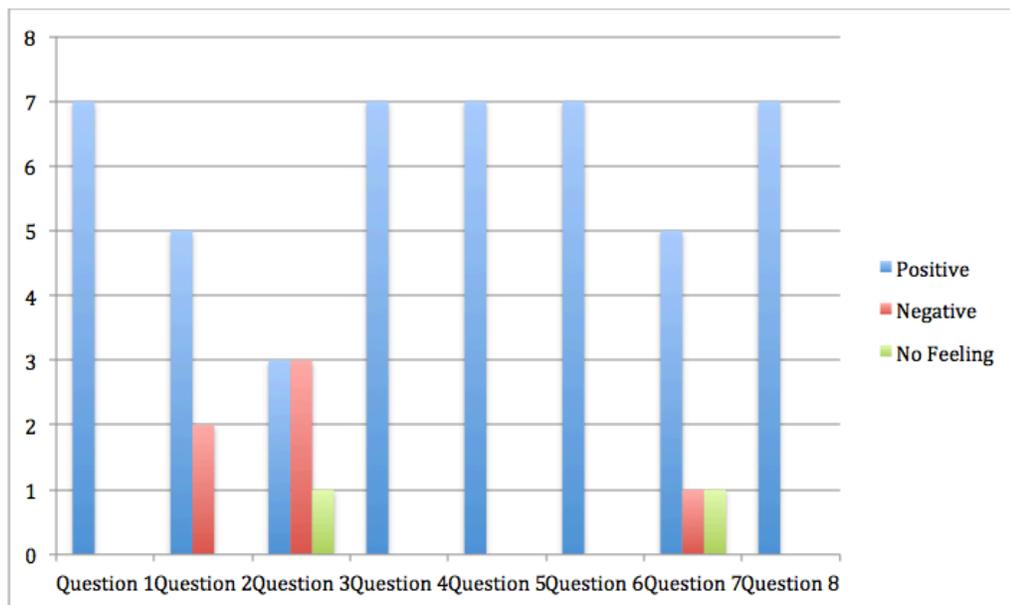
When I began to score students on the diagnostic survey, (Appendix E), I knew I had to create a table to organize each student's scores. This table allowed me to use small groups and plan my small group lessons. The instructional

planning showed me that many students learned more letters and sounds by the end of the study. It also showed students were able to read more consonant vowel consonant words in both isolation and connected text. Looking at the table you could easily see an increase of skills on the continuum of phonological awareness.

### **Analysis of Pre- and Post-Survey**

When looking at the students' pre and post reading survey there were far less negative feelings by the end of study (Appendix G). Student, Jay, who felt awful at the beginning of my study, was now feeling awesome by the end of it. Kane and Ken who originally felt that they were doing okay in reading, now felt they were doing good and even awesome. The confidence levels were definitely impacted. Students like Jane, Kane, and Jay seemed to like both whole and small group much better than when they initially began my study. Students were all engaged and motivated to participate in both small group and whole group reading. Their end of study survey results certainly showed much more happy faces colored in and students were even eager to color in double happy faces when asked, "How do you feel about reading?" This showed far more positive feelings and less negative as seen in the figure below (See Figure 5.1).

Another method of collecting data was taken through an oral interview. These teacher-posed questions allowed students to express what they liked about small group and their feelings about reading (Appendix H). Engaging in student communication helped build confidence and positive student-teacher relationship.



**Figure 5.1 End of Study Reading Survey Results**

**Analysis of Core Phoneme Segmentation Test**

Although this assessment is geared for grades second through sixth, I felt it provided valuable data throughout my study (Appendix D). Due to the skills that were being taught and the expectations during my small group, students used sound box instruction to increase their skills in phonological awareness. The Core Phoneme Segmentation survey allowed me to see how students were segmenting sounds in their words. This assessment was out of 15 words and consisted of both blends and digraphs. In the beginning all students scored less than 50%. By the

end, all students increased by at least five more words correct. All students, except for one, scored 83% or higher on the final achievement test

(See Table 5.1). The student who did not score as close to proficient as I would hope was the student who received an IEP. It was apparent that all students were beginning to learn how to correctly segment blends, digraphs, and multi-syllabic words. Jane, Kane, and Jade scored the highest scores on the beginning of study Core Phoneme Segmentation Test.

At the end of the study, these students segmented eight, six, and six more words correctly on their post achievement test. Ken who originally scored a zero out of fifteen correct had now segmented five words correctly that even consisted of blends and r-controlled vowels. This student also began with only knowing two letter sounds and able to identify ten letters correctly; therefore, progress was certainly made. With more explicit instruction, targeted small group instruction, and more independent practice time I can hope all of these students will increase their phonological skills.

### **Analysis of Data through Codes and Bins**

Through the use of coding and creating bins, I was able to organize and interpret data throughout my study (See Figure 5.2). I began coding both my double entry journal and timeline of instruction to begin to make connections. Surveys and interviews were also coded to help understand feelings of my

students. Little did I know, the connections I was making among my students' behaviors and attitudes would be the themes of my study.

<b>Student</b>	<b>Pre-Test Core Phoneme Segmentation # correct/total #</b>	<b>Post-Test Core Phoneme Segmentation # correct/total #</b>
Jane	6/15	14/15
Kane	7/15	13/15
Jade	6/15	12/15
Lilly	4/15	13/15
Kylie	4/15	12/15
Ken	0/15	5/15
Jay	4/15	12/15

**Table 5.1 Core Phoneme Segmentation Pre and Post Test**

Throughout the coding process, I was able to reflect and sort behaviors from not only my students but also myself. These reflections helped me provide better teaching strategies throughout my action research process. I was able to hone in on specific target skills I needed to be much more explicit when teaching.

Once I was finished with coding, I was able to sort words and create my bins. The bins of my study consisted of reading achievement, communication, student participation, instructional practices, feelings, teacher observations, and

outside contributors. In each of these bins some of the codes that they contained were growth on achievement tests, communication between students and teacher, teaching practices like modeling and independent practice, positive and negative teacher observations, feelings throughout the study, error patterns, and increase and decrease of student participation.

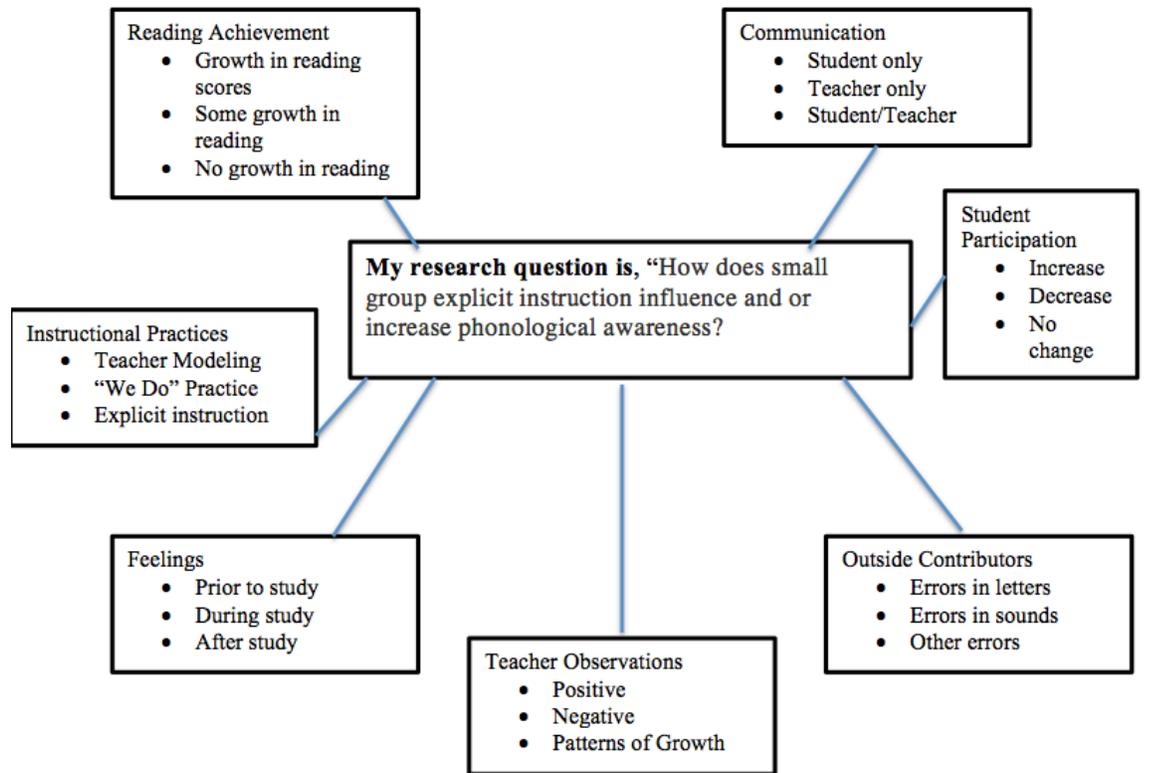
After I identified bins and created the themes of my study (See Figure 5.3). I was able to better understand findings in my action research. I was now seeing how they were relying on each other to provide more insight on what I saw throughout my study. The bin of communication was noted through my double entry journal, reading survey, and oral interview. I could see which students communicated regularly with the teacher and peers during small group. I often would record student phrases to better understand their confidence level and feelings about reading. Students who were often struggling during group would continue to engage in daily conversations but only noted teacher-student interaction.

The bin of student participation was determined after seeing an increase in student participation. In my double entry journal, it was noted students were raising their hand more and asking when to come to small group. Student feelings were also noted by taking direct quotes from discussions had during small groups.

The next few bins of instructional practices, teacher observations, and outside contributors were created directly from both my double entry journal,

timeline of data collection, student reading surveys, and oral interview. These showed specific student error patterns, patterns of growth, and what skills I was explicitly incorporating in small group. I drove much of my instruction from their performance on assessments; however, my double entry journal and timeline of data were helpful tools for these codes and bins. The illustration (See Figure 5.2) represents how each bin was interdependent on each other. It also unified some of codes, which allowed me to change any of my instruction through this power of action research.

By creating theme statements, I was able to summarize some of my findings that were right in front of me all along. It was not until this organizational process that I dove deep into my data and made much more connections about my students. I was able to see such growth in all of my students.



**Figure 5.2 Codes and Bin**

### **Theme Statements**

- Teacher plays an essential role in targeting at-risk students in the classroom. Through the use of observation and formative and summative assessments, a facilitator of learning can provide immediate attention to these students.
- Patterns of errors occur from some of the same students and allowed me to place these students in the same small group. Teaching in a small group allowed students to receive daily explicit instruction with sufficient repetition of skills.
- Observations and weekly formative assessments allow the teacher to see specific error patterns and address them through more explicit instruction during small group. This also enhances the power of reflection, as I can better plan my small group lessons accordingly.
- Small group explicit instruction affected my students by increasing their letter sound knowledge, which had been seen through weekly formative assessments, teacher observations, and post assessments.
- Sound box use was an effective systematic routine used daily with students. It allowed teacher modeling, student practice, and independent assessment to occur in small group setting.
- Students all increased scores in segmentation through the systematic routine of the use of sound boxes.
- Students shared positive aspects of working in small groups verbally during small group instruction without teacher prompts during their oral interview and through student surveys.
- Students have gained more confidence in the early literacy skills and participated more in whole group core instruction by raising their hands to participate and answering more positively on their reading survey.

**Figure 5.3 Theme Statements**

## THEME STATEMENTS

**Teacher plays an essential role in targeting at-risk students in the classroom.**

**Through the use of observation and formative and summative assessments, a facilitator of learning can provide immediate attention to these students.**

After finding success in my small group setting, I realized a teacher plays an essential role in targeting at-risk students in the classroom. Students who were not achieving success in the area of phonological awareness needed immediate attention. Through the use of reflection, a universal screener, and pre-assessments, I was able to target seven students. I had to obtain an active role as their facilitator of learning throughout this whole process by instructing, monitoring, and engaging them every step of the way. These seven students dove deep into the research process with me by providing much effort throughout the entire study.

**Patterns of errors occur from some of the same students and allowed me to place these students in the same small group. Teaching in a small group allowed students to receive daily explicit instruction with sufficient repetition of skills.**

I provided explicit instruction in the area of phonological awareness using our school curriculum and the use of sound boxes as an intervention in small group. The skills were targeted after identifying both weaknesses and strengths of each individual student through the Diagnostic Phonological Survey from my core curriculum Wonders. All students were placed into two small groups based on

their similar skill deficits. For example, students who still did not master identifying all their letters and sounds were placed in small group one. They would receive much repetition and practice on letter sounds in words. It was important for students in this group to build up both their phonemic and letter knowledge.

Repetition of skills and practice time was essential in the learning of these at-risk students. Lisa Delpit emphasizes, “Never do the successful teachers of these children believe that students have learned enough or that they cannot learn more” (p. 37). Allowing students to practice skills and strategies in literacy in my small group gave them extra support in reading. I was able to see these students make progress in all areas in my classroom. With ten weeks of extra small group support and explicit instruction, I saw an increase in scores with these students. All students but one scored at least eight percent on their end of study achievement test. Students were already showing me a gained appreciation of learning and participating more in my classroom.

**Observations and weekly formative assessments allow the teacher to see specific error patterns and address them through more explicit instruction during small group. This also enhances the power of reflection, as I can to better plan my small group lessons accordingly.**

My double entry journal allowed me to document error patterns among students. Students' weekly assessments were also used to help drive my teaching

instruction each week. Weekly assessments consisted of the teacher saying three words to each student and asking them to segment correctly. No two students in the same group received the same words. Students were then targeted on the errors that were made on both pre-assessments and teacher observations during daily instruction. I was looking to hone in on skills that students were consistently making errors on. Teacher reflection played a significant role when being explicit in my teaching. It was an effective tool throughout this entire process because I could identify specific sound errors and re-teach them to my small groups.

**Small group explicit instruction affected my students by increasing their letter sound knowledge, which had been seen through weekly formative assessments, teacher observations, and post assessments.**

Paul Freire states “To achieve this goal, the oppressed must confront reality critically, simultaneously objectifying and acting upon that reality ” (Freire, 1970, p. 52). Students may not always be given the attention they need and begin to get lost in whole group instruction. The need for small groups with targeted instruction in phonemic awareness increased our end goal of higher scores in reading. Research supports emphasis on small group instruction and teaching phonological skills in literacy for young children. When students were able to work in small groups, skills were reinforced and applied. Students had time for independent practice as well as modeling of explicit letter sounds and segmentation of sounds in words. This allowed students to build a better

phonemic and phonics foundation in hopes to increase their ability to begin learning to decode words.

Word reading activities would be assessed frequently through first grade. I needed to increase their early phonemic and phonic skills that would be needed to learn to read and write. Students also developed a positive relationship with myself in a small group setting. I was able to communicate with each student daily, provide reinforcement, and cater to students who were considered at-risk.

**Sound box use was an effective systematic routine used daily with students. It allowed teacher modeling, student practice, and independent assessment to occur in small group setting.**

Sound boxes allowed students to learn explicit letter sound skills, meet in small group, and use systematic routines to enhance the repetition of skills. The repetition of skills was something these students needed. The additional support I provided allowed them to find more success in the area of segmenting sounds and learning letter sounds when using sound boxes.

With the use of sound boxes, students were able to identify and manipulate sounds in words. By adding the sound box instruction as part of their intervention, it allowed them to add a new learning style through kinesthetic learning. Students heard the sounds first and begin to slowly pull apart the sounds to begin segmenting sounds in words. After implementing the use of sound boxes students were beginning to identify, isolate, and manipulate sounds in my very

own classroom. Students used chips or tiles to create new words each session they met with me. This explicit instruction during our small group time was beneficial for my students, yet I knew it was not going to be the only “intentional” reading instruction I scaffold for my students.

**Students all increased scores in segmentation through the systematic routine of the use of sound boxes.**

Delpit helps explain, “What happens when we assume that certain children are less than brilliant? Our tendency is to teach less, to teach down, to teach for remediation” (Delpit, 2012, p. 6). Although I am scaffolding and modeling for students to give extra support in the area of reading, I am making sure I am giving them the chance to level up as well. They need to be exposed to higher level thinking skills in the area of literacy even if some are still at the beginning stages of learning how to read. Students will receive remediation in reading in our small group, but the teaching will not be of less value. Explicit teaching in our group will ensure active engagement and time to practice these phonemic awareness and phonic skills using sound boxes. By the end, students were not only using the sound boxes to segment sounds in words, but also spelling the words correctly in the boxes. Their increased scores in the area of phoneme segmentation allowed me to provide less scaffolding and increase their independence in the area of phonological awareness.

My students would still need a balanced literacy approach filled with various opportunities throughout the day to focus on their phonological skills. This would be provided during their core. The balance of both phonological awareness and providing them opportunity to be exposed to text allowed these at-risk students build a solid foundation in literacy. Students who were once struggling in the area of phonological awareness were receiving immediate attention, positive teacher interactions, and much repetition of skills throughout their day.

My intervention allowed targeted skills to be the main focus for these at-risk students. All students increased their scores on the beginning of study Core Phoneme Segmentation Assessment. All students showed growth in the area of phonological awareness when looking at their Phonological Skill Inventory Survey. Students learned more letters, sounds, and were able to blend more consonant vowel consonants (cvc), in both isolation and connected text. Students also engaged more in the process of learning to read and write by participating more in both small group and whole group. I was able to foster a relationship that built off the passion I have for reading. Students were much more engaged in the process of learning to read. Parents were commenting much more about reading during our parent teacher conference and recording more books on their nightly reading logs.

**Students shared positive aspects of working in small groups verbally during small group instruction without teacher prompts during their oral interview, and through student surveys.**

Positive feelings of this study were shared during the study both verbally and in written form from my first grade students. Through the use of an end of study survey and teacher observation, I saw the enjoyment of reading be instilled in each student. They showed excitement when coming to small group, raised their hand more during our core instruction, and lit up when asked to pick up a new book from our classroom library. The students followed the systematic routine so well during small group they would often tell me what would come next before I had the opportunity to speak. Students would set up their chips ready to listen and ready to practice their phonological skills.

Using surveys allowed me to see how they really felt when asked to answer them independently and not in front of their peers. Peer pressure to like a part in school can also be felt among students the same age. I was pleased to see there were far more happier faces colored in on student surveys at the end of our study. These students were beginning to feel “awesome” about reading. Each time we met in group, students were eager to participate which was shown when they were raising their hand and speaking about small group instruction.

John Dewey states, “It is also true that no general rule can be laid down for dealing with such cases. The teacher has to deal with them individually. They

fall into general classes, but no two are exactly alike. The educator has to discover as best he or she can the causes for the recalcitrant attitudes” (p. 56). I had to keep in mind no two students were the same throughout this entire process so through the use of two surveys, oral interviews, and double entry recording observations let me be aware of all student feelings.

Paul Freire explains, “The students-no longer docile listeners- are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher” (Freire, 1970, p. 81) During the study students were able to engage daily in teacher-led and student-led conversations. I asked them how they were feeling in small group compared to when they are in a whole group literacy class. I saw a big difference in my students, perhaps because I gave them a voice from the beginning of study until now. They were even participating more in whole group activities when asking for volunteers.

## **NEXT STEPS**

To continue to build a strong foundation for students in the area of literacy, it is essential to build on skills they already have and provide explicit instruction in areas where there are deficits. I would like to continue using small groups throughout the day. I will continue to use assessments to drive my instruction and deliver intentional teaching in the area of phonological awareness.

After the study, I continued to see positive effects in the area of phonological awareness. Students were moving on the phonological skills of continuum. During our 140-minute literacy block, students were moving to higher level reading skills. Students who were once stuck in a letter identification group moved to a CVC fluency group. This is where students were asked to begin blending three to four sounds in words, identify vowel sounds, and begin reading in connected text. They were working on reading words both accurately and automatically so that they could become fluent readers. Students were also scoring almost two out of two questions correct on their weekly Wonders assessment in the phonemic awareness section. Questions would ask students to listen to a word and segment sounds. It would also ask students to count the number of phonemes in words.

This showed me my students were building their phonological background and also increasing their ability to segment sounds in words. Other students from my intervention group have moved on to a blend or digraph group. Their groups

are also working on building fluency when reading words that contain both blends and digraphs. Most students are beginning to read connected text on a first grade level with less teacher support. Students are engaged in the reading process in the classroom. They are manipulating, deleting, and now substituting sounds in words. When segmenting was just too hard before with much practice, repetition, and modeling students were able to build a stronger phonemic background in segmenting. They were ready to begin decoding texts and start the process of learning to read in first grade.

Success comes in many shapes and sizes. We celebrated any small successes along the way of this process. Through the use of observations, I was able to reflect so I could provide more meaningful learning experiences for them. Writing down specific student quotes allowed me to engage in much more active conversations with these students. This allowed me to foster a positive relationship between the student and teacher during our small group time. Students who were once not comfortable to participate are some of most active students in my classroom.

Increase of achievement scores were certainly accomplished through the use of sound boxes. All but one student scored above 80% percent in just a ten-week small group of targeted instruction. However, the most rewarding part of this entire process was seeing less negative feelings on their end of study reading survey. It takes much teacher support and positive learning experiences in reading

to get students to believe in themselves. These once struggling readers have gained confidence and are increasing their literacy development in first grade. I will continue to engage in this process of literacy with my students as I promote a positive learning environment filled with multiple opportunities of learning to read and write. Through the use of explicit instruction and the continued use of small groups in my classroom, I hope to get more students reading on a first grade reading level.

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## Appendix A: Principal Consent Form

April 18, 2017

Dear Mrs. Lynch,

I'm currently a graduate student at Moravian College. In Fall of 2017, I will enroll in a course called EDUC 702: *Reflective Practice*, which focuses on my thesis in order to graduate with my masters in Curriculum and Instruction along with my Reading Specialist degree. This class requires me to conduct a teacher action research study in my classroom. The purpose of my study is to increase phonological awareness in students using explicit small group instruction. I will be doing this after beginning the training by our district. I will begin my action research during the month of September and finish before my fall course is complete. Students will work on phonological skills by building on these specific skills each week in my small group instruction. Some examples of an activity that may be used during that time are word and sound boxes to identify the amount of phonemes in words. Students will practice listening to oral phonemic awareness warm-ups, have time to practice, and work on writing the letter correspondence to each of the letter sounds.

I will work with three to five students in hopes to increase their scores in the area of phonological awareness. I will also have students take a survey to better understand their feelings and confidence in reading. My goal is for students to increase or influence the effects of explicit small group instruction in the area of phonological awareness. The timeframe of this study will be throughout the months September through December. All research participants will be provided with a pseudonym for purpose of discussion so that they remain anonymous. My instructor and I will have access to the data collected. Information concerning the study will be discussed with a research support group at Moravian College using pseudonyms. All of the students will participate in the regular curriculum, but each child's data will only be used with parental/guardian consent. Research materials will be kept in a secure, locked location outside of the classroom and will be destroyed after the completion of the study. Students may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty, but will still be required to complete all classroom work. You can withdraw from the study at any point by telling me directly or using my attached email below. If any questions or concerns arise, please do not hesitate to contact me at [nerney@basdschools.org](mailto:nerney@basdschools.org). Questions may also be directed to my Moravian College Professor, Dr. Tristan Gleasan, at [gleasant@moravian.edu](mailto:gleasant@moravian.edu).

Thank you for your consideration,  
Nicole Erney

\_\_\_\_ Yes, you have my permission to conduct this study in your classroom.

\_\_\_\_ No, you do not have my permission to conduct this study in your classroom.

\_\_\_\_\_ Signature

\_\_\_\_\_ Date

## Appendix B: Parent/Guardian Consent Form

August 25, 2017

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I'm currently a graduate student at Moravian College. This semester I am enrolled in a course called EDUC 702: Reflective Practice, which requires me to conduct a teacher action research study in my classroom. The purpose of my study is to increase phonological awareness in students using explicit small group instruction. I will be doing this after beginning the training by our district. I will begin my action research during the month of September and finish before my fall course is complete. Students will work on phonological skills by building on these specific skills each week in my small group instruction. Some examples of an activity that may be used during that time are word and sound boxes to identify the amount of phonemes in words. Students will practice listening to oral phonemic awareness warm-ups, have time to practice, and work on writing the letter correspondence to each of the letter sounds.

The timeframe of this study will be throughout the months of September through December. All research participants will be provided with a pseudonym for purpose of discussion so that they remain anonymous. His or her name will not be used during any part of my study. My instructor and I will have access to the data collected. Information concerning the study will be discussed with a research support group at Moravian College using the pseudonyms. All of the students will participate in the curriculum, but each child's data will only be used should the parents/guardians choose to the child's consent. Research materials will be kept in a secure, locked location outside of the classroom and will be destroyed after the completion of the study. Students may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty, but will still be required to complete all classroom work.

If any questions or concerns arise, please do not hesitate to contact me at [nerney@basdschools.org](mailto:nerney@basdschools.org). Questions may also be directed to my Moravian College Professor, Dr. Tristan Gleasan, at [gleasant@moravian.edu](mailto:gleasant@moravian.edu), or (610) 861-1482. Thank you for your consideration,

Miss Erney

Please choose one of the following:

Yes, you have my permission to use my son's/daughter's information for your study.

No, you do not have my permission to use my son's/daughter's information for your study.

\_\_\_\_\_ Parent Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date

**Appendix C: Student Consent Form**

**Student Consent Form**



Yes I agree to allow Miss Erney to use my reading survey and assessment scores in her research project.



No I do not want Miss Erney to use my reading survey and assessment scores in her research project.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\* You can withdraw from my study at anytime by telling Miss Erney you no longer want to be part of her study

## Appendix D: Core Phoneme Segmentation Test

### CORE Phoneme Segmentation Test

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Have students use different-colored blocks to show the number of phonemes in each of the Practice Items. Then administer the test. Mark "+" to indicate a correct response or "-" to indicate an incorrect response. Record students' exact responses on the blank lines.

Practice Items: sit (s-i-t); shop (sh-o-p)

1. thumb (th-u-m) (+) (-) \_\_\_\_\_
2. skate (s-k-ā-t) (+) (-) \_\_\_\_\_
3. shriek (sh-r-ē-k) (+) (-) \_\_\_\_\_
4. large (l-ar-j) (+) (-) \_\_\_\_\_
5. drop (d-r-o-p) (+) (-) \_\_\_\_\_
6. flew (f-l-oo) (+) (-) \_\_\_\_\_
7. chalk (ch-au-k) (+) (-) \_\_\_\_\_
8. germ (j-er-m) (+) (-) \_\_\_\_\_
9. spread (s-p-r-e-d) (+) (-) \_\_\_\_\_
10. train (t-r-ā-n) (+) (-) \_\_\_\_\_
11. stork (s-t-or-k) (+) (-) \_\_\_\_\_
12. bolt (b-ō-l-t) (+) (-) \_\_\_\_\_
13. glare (g-l-air) (+) (-) \_\_\_\_\_
14. crowd (k-r-ou-d) (+) (-) \_\_\_\_\_
15. point (p-oi-n-t) (+) (-) \_\_\_\_\_

Items Correct \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E: Diagnostic Phonological Survey

### Phonics and Decoding Grades K-6

<b>Grades K-1</b>							
1. Letters			Score				Score
(a) Names	m t a s i r d f o g l h u c n b j k y e w p v qu x z		/26	(b) Sounds	/m/ /t/ /a/ /s/ /l/ /r/ /d/ /t/ /o/ /g/ /l/ /h/ /u/ /k/ /n/ /b/ /j/ /k/ /y/ /e/ /w/ /p/ /v/ /kw/ /ks/ /z/	Consonants:  /21  Vowels:  /5	
<b>Grade 1</b>							
2. VC and CVC					Comments	Score	
(a) In List	wat fod leb tum pon sib cug raf mip hev					/10	
(b) In Text	<i>Sam and Ben hid the gum. Pat had a nap in bed. Mom had a top on a big pot. Tim can sit in a tub.</i>					/20	
<b>Grade 1</b>							
3. Consonant Digraphs					Comments	Score	
(a) In List	shap ming gack whum pith chan thog kosh mich whaf					/10	
(b) In Text	<i>That duck had a wet wing. Dad hit a log with a whip. When can Chip pack? A fish is in that tub.</i>					/10	
<b>Grade 1</b>							
4. CVCC and CCVC					Comments	Score	
(a) In List	clab trin snaf greb slad fosp lonk mant jast sund					/10	
(b) In Text	<i>Glen will swim past the raft in the pond. The frog must flip and spin and jump.</i>					/10	
<b>Grades 1-2</b>							
5. Silent e					Comments	Score	
(a) In List	sice nole fune moze vate rine lade sile gane fote					/10	
(b) In Text	<i>Mike and Jane use a rope to ride the mule. Pete had five tapes at home.</i>					/10	

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## Appendix F: Timeline of Data Collection

<p><b>9/13 Parent Permission Slips returned</b>  <b>Student Assent forms completed</b>  <b>Reading Survey administered</b>  <b>See Reading Survey Break Down- below</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 1 terrible awful negative feeling</li> <li>2. 2 Okay I kind of like reading</li> <li>3. 2 Okay I kind of like it 1 terrible awful</li> <li>4. 1 terrible awful</li> <li>5. 4 like when they are not reading</li> <li>6. 1 Not good and 1 Terrible feeling when they get reading grades back</li> <li>7. 1 Okay I kind of like it to read in class 1 not good and 1 terrible</li> <li>8. 2 terrible awful when asked to read in small group and 1 okay</li> </ol> <p>Begin student teacher communication, positive reinforcement, and peer discussions to promote building relationships in small groups.</p>
<p><b>9/14 Pre-Assessment Core Phoneme Segmentation Test</b>  Data from Dibels Universal Screener gathered to decide which students would need further diagnostic screeners which would taken from Wonders Diagnostic Screener this will show some specific skills that students will need to work on. This will not be given again throughout the study only to use for instructional planning purposes. Instructional Planning sheet showed students needed more letter and letter sound review. Blends and digraphs were also noted in our double entry after looking at results on Segmentation test below.  <b>Beginning Phoneme Segmentation Test</b>  JCV- 6/15 JT- 4/15 JF-6/15 KD 7/15 KRu-0/15 LF-4/15 KRo-4/15</p>
<p><b>9/15 Week 1 Began Small groups- systematic routines set in place</b>  <b>Small Group- total of 7 students</b>  <b>10 mins. Daily Phonemic warm-up</b>-taken from Wonders by Mcgraw Hill Education 1<sup>st</sup> grade curriculum which follows a 5 day cycle rotating phonemic skills such as identify rhyme, phoneme isolation, phoneme blending, and phoneme segmentation.  <b>15 mins Sound Boxes</b>- Then break into 3 and 4 student groups to work on phoneme segmentation using sound boxes  <b>25 minutes in small group explicit instruction systematic routines using sound boxes</b></p>
<p><b>9/15 Week 2 Segmenting phonemes -3 words given with 3 phonemes with short a</b>  JF-3/3  JCV-3/3  KD-2/3  JT-2/3  KRu-0/3  LF-2/3 KRo-2/3</p>

**Week 3 9/22 Identifying Medial Phonemes**

JF 2/3 JCV 3/3 KRu 1/3 KRo 2/3  
KD 2/3 LF 3/3 JT 2/3

**Week 4 9/29- Identifying 3 Phoneme words using Short i words**

JCV- 2/3 KR- 1/3 LF-3/3  
KD-2/3 JT-3/3  
KRo-2/3 JF-2/3

**Week 5 10/6 Short a/ i double consonants**

JT 3/3 hiss bill sack  
JF 2/3 fill mill zip  
LF- pill zap win 3/3  
JCV pass kiss hip 3/3  
KRu **add (t) rib** took out last sound till 0/3  
KD fizz **Sam (n) dig** 2/3

**Week 5 10/13 Oral Interview**

Students were eager to answer that they all like something about small group instruction. Not all students however all but one did not all feel like they are getting better. Two questions were posed and answered with teacher prompts when needed.

**10/20 Week 6 Short o with digraphs and l blends Weekly Assessment**

JF-clock lot cop 3/3  
JCV- flock pot mop 3/3  
JT-shock rot hop 3/3  
KD-block hot chop 2/3 not separating bl blend bl as 1 sound  
KRu-stop top pop 1/3  
KRo-rock knot stop 2/3 missing the /t/ in stop  
LF-knock blot top 2/3 lock for knock

**10/27 Week 6 R and S blends Weekly Assessment**

KRu- skip grass swim 1/3 missing /k/ in skip and /j/ for /g/ in grass also missing r blend  
JT-slip skill grab 3/3  
JF- slap stop frill 3/3  
KRo- stock slack frog 2/3 missing /t/ in stock said sock  
KD -stick track Fran 2/3 missing r blend in track /t/ /a/ /ck/  
JCV- drop stiff crab 3/3  
LF- smack drip crop 2/3 missing /m/ in

**11/2 Week 7 R S L blend Weekly Assessment**

JT crib slap (slab) clip (clib)

KD- crab frog (fog) slap 3/3

JF-slick flip grab 3/3

KRo- stock flap (falp) grass 2/3

LF-flap swim skip 3/3

KRu- brag (drad) skim flop 2/3

JCV-grill stop flag 3/3

**11/10 Week 8 Short e spelled e and ea Weekly Assessment**

JF- set neck beg 3/3

KD- smell (slell) bet men 2/3

KRo- ten press press jet 3/3

JCV- bread fell hen 3/3

KRu- head get leg 3/3

LF- yet bell (b-ell) red 2/3

JT- wet well yes 3/3

# Reading Survey

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## 1. How do you feel about reading?



Terrible  
Awful  
1

Not Good  
I don't like it  
2

Okay  
I kind of like it  
3

Good  
I like it  
4

Awesome  
I love it  
5

## 2. How are you doing in reading?



Terrible  
Awful  
1

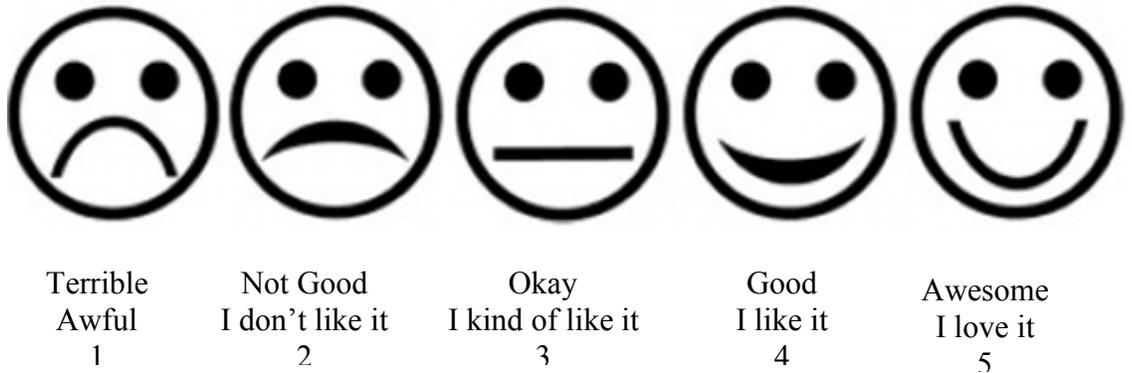
Not Good  
I don't like it  
2

Okay  
I kind of like it  
3

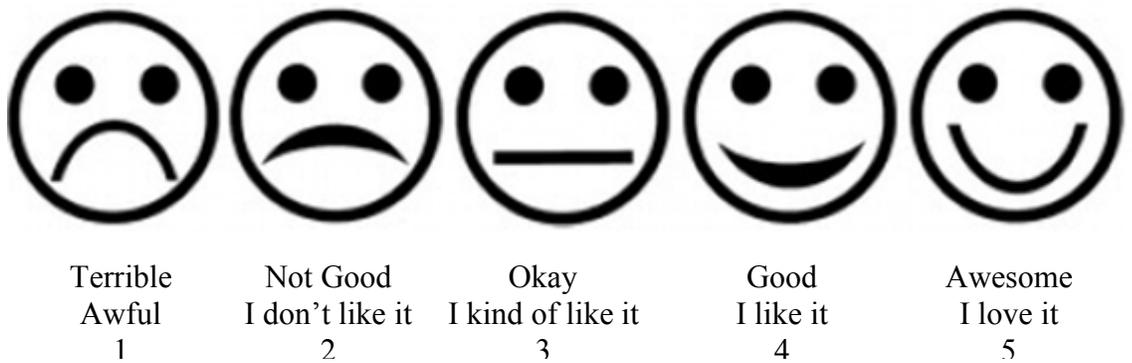
Good  
I like it  
4

Awesome  
I love it  
5

### 3. How do you feel when you are in whole group reading?



### 4. How do you feel when you are in Miss Erney's small group reading?



**5. How do you feel when you are not reading?**



Terrible  
Awful  
1

Not Good  
I don't like it  
2

Okay  
I kind of like it  
3

Good  
I like it  
4

Awesome  
I love it  
5

**6. How do you feel when you get grades back in reading?**



Terrible  
Awful  
1

Not Good  
I don't like it  
2

Okay  
I kind of like it  
3

Good  
I like it  
4

Awesome  
I love it  
5

**7. How do you feel when you are asked to read in class?**



Terrible  
Awful  
1

Not Good  
I don't like it  
2

Okay  
I kind of like it  
3

Good  
I like it  
4

Awesome  
I love it  
5

**8. How do you feel when you are asked to read in Miss Erney's small group?**



Terrible  
Awful  
1

Not Good  
I don't like it  
2

Okay  
I kind of like it  
3

Good  
I like it  
4

Awesome  
I love it  
5

## Appendix H: Oral Interview Questions

### Miss Erney's Oral Interview

1. What do you like about working in small group?

Student- "I like working in small groups because \_\_\_\_\_,"

2. Do you think working in small group is helping your reading?

Student- "It is helping me \_\_\_\_\_."

**Teacher Prompt:** First grade students use these questions and sentence starters to think about our first couple of weeks of small group. I will record your responses as you share them with Miss Erney.