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MODIFYING CURRENT LITERACY CURRICULUM:
EXPLORING STRATEGIES TO MEET THE NEEDS OF STRUGGLING
FIRST GRADE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study examined four different instructional literacy strategies designed to meet the needs of struggling first graders. Participants were 20 first graders in an elementary school located in the outskirts of an urban community. Early assessments showed that three students had difficulty in the areas of letter identification, phonological awareness, phonics, and blending. These students were fairly lower than the rest of the students in the class. These students were observed during specially designed instruction given individually, in small groups, in centers, and through peer tutoring. The students were less frustrated and more motivated to learn literacy skills when involved in these methods. Time on task improved when students' instructional time was geared to their academic levels. When tested again later in the school year, all three struggling students had increased their knowledge of letter identification, phonological awareness, and phonics. Oral reading fluency, decoding, and blending also improved. The presence of these instructional strategies enhanced overall reading performance and helped narrow the academic gap between the struggling students and their classmates.

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I am indebted to my family for their constant encouragement and reassurance. They championed me to stay motivated and focused. Their unconditional love and appreciation provided me with the support I needed to finish this research study.

Finally, I dedicate this thesis to all those teachers who have ever had trouble meeting the needs of their struggling students.

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RESEARCHER STANCE

Bobby sat with an eager smile on his face, his hands folded nicely, his pencil sharpened to a fine point, as he patiently awaited the start of the literacy lesson. As I began, I kept a close eye on him. I sensed that something was not quite right. As the days progressed, I noticed his smile faded and his eager expression disappeared. I wondered what was happening inside his head. I continued to teach, thinking he would be fine and knowing that eventually, he would catch on. I convinced myself that all he needed was a little extra practice on the skills he found so confusing.

Each day forward was similar to this one. Bobby was always set to learn, but somehow he always lost his enthusiasm. I continued to ignore this problem, secretly hoping it would go away. It never did! His patience finally gave way to sheer frustration. There was never a smile on his face. Bobby no longer wanted to be at school. He did not look at me while I was teaching. He often hung his head or held it in his hands. What had I done? Had I destroyed this child's love of learning? How could I have ignored him? How could I allow for this frustration and struggle to continue? Did other students share these feelings? Bobby was a struggling student, one who did not catch on to literacy skills and who ultimately fell behind the rest of my first graders.

Bobby wanted to learn so badly, and he tried his best, but he just did not understand phonics, decoding, and blending. Was I moving too fast? Should I

slow down? If I slowed down, would the rest of the class become bored? I didn't know what to do! How could I run my classroom so *all* the students could learn effectively and efficiently? I needed to determine where he was having the most trouble and what I could do to help him. On a day-to-day basis, I taught lessons *assuming* - no, *hoping* - that my students were keeping up and catching on. While most of them were, there always seemed to be a handful that appeared distracted and were often off task. At first I was angry about this behavior, but then I realized those students were just not yet capable of doing the assigned work. Once I realized their behavior was not necessarily their fault, I had a constant, overwhelming feeling of guilt. My stress increased to a whole new level. It was clear I needed to reevaluate my teaching methods. But how? Where do I start? Would I have the time? Could I do it alone? Who would help me? I wanted to cry!

I took a step back and reflected on my teaching experiences. As I thought about this over and over again, I discovered that during each year I had a small group of students who just could not keep up with the rest of the class when it came to the literacy curriculum. However, I pushed on through the curriculum in fear that I would not cover it all and my students would not be prepared for the next year. I never stopped to acknowledge who was succeeding or, more importantly, who was not. I was providing a disservice to the students who were not ready to move on. Dewey (1938) said, "Every experience influences in some

degree the objective conditions under which further experiences are had” (p. 37). My own naiveté and ignorance allowed struggling students to continue to struggle and become frustrated. They were disengaged and unenthusiastic about literacy. Suddenly, my guilt turned to fear. I was afraid they would give up on school and on themselves.

My students suffered before my eyes. I realized it was time to stop being afraid and start taking chances. Exactly how I was going to do that was still a mystery. I knew that I could no longer push students through the curriculum. Vygotsky (1978) explained, “The zone of proximal development defines those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation” (p. 86). It was time for me to take ownership and responsibility for my students. I needed to teach the students skills they could use and develop. I did not want to watch their little faces fill with frustration and angst. Enough was enough!

As part of my graduate work, I began doing some teacher action research to help me begin to solve the problem. In my first mini-study, I researched how I could facilitate reading and writing instruction for my struggling students. That particular year I had four low achieving students. These four students, significantly below their classmates in the areas of reading and writing, were often off task, distracted, and frustrated during whole group instruction. These students received slightly over two hours of Title I services every week, but this was not enough support.

According to Duffy-Hester (1999), struggling readers need more than short-term interventions; they also need effective reading instruction within the regular classroom. Therefore, I began to focus my efforts on small group instruction. I followed Duffy-Hester's advice to engage students in a wide array of activities with clear instructional merit and avoided low-level tasks that did not directly contribute to reading growth. Therefore, during small group instruction, I worked with struggling students to practice letter sounds and to begin blending words. We also worked on decoding words that were difficult to read and a variety of writing strategies, which included outlining and journaling. We read aloud and used picture cues to improve comprehension and fluency.

The students eagerly practiced these skills with the other group members and with me. I witnessed less frustration, increased enthusiasm, and at least some acquisition of literacy skills. In a small group setting, it was much easier for me to meet the needs of these individual learners. They were more focused, attentive, and successful. It was clear these students were doing much better academically. I believed their confidence was growing, and I hoped that they all would soon be reading in whole group situations. However, I was wrong in many cases. Unfortunately, many struggling students were unable to transfer small group successes to the large group setting. Why couldn't they carry these behaviors to the whole group settings? Again, I was baffled and frustrated. What else could I possibly do?

In small groups we continued to work on skills and strategies geared to each student's specific needs. While I was with a group, the rest of the class worked at literacy centers, reinforcing skills that I had previously taught. However, when I was working with a group of on-level students, the struggling students were often off task at the centers and later told me that they disliked center time.

Then it hit me; they could not successfully work through the centers because they did not initially understand the skills that were being reinforced. I realized that this time of the day was wasted for them. I feared their frustration and boredom would turn into behavior issues. I did not know what to do about this. How might I support my strugglers who could not yet work independently through the centers like the rest of the class? I was angry, frustrated, and felt there was no way out. I began to dislike center time, too. I dreaded doing small group instruction because I was afraid of how center time would run, but I knew how crucial the small group instruction time was. Omitting it was not an option. I was stuck. . . again!

New problems were all laid out for me in black and white. One: small group instruction benefited my struggling students, but only in the small group setting. Two: my strugglers, who needed the small group instruction, could not effectively work through centers while I was with other groups. Therefore, that time was wasted for the strugglers. I wanted to scream. I saw no answers. I

needed help. How was I going to get out of this mess? Could I just ignore it and go back to my old ways of teaching? As horrible as it sounds to me now, that is just what I wanted to do. It would be easier, I thought. I was frustrated because everything I tried did not work.

Although I was tempted to give up, I set up a meeting with the Instructional Support teacher, Ms. D. She helped me calm down and brainstorm some other ideas to try with the class. She suggested that I create a more effective center schedule, one that would hold the students accountable for their work. As a result, I divided the class into five groups, each group having three centers to complete on a given day. Incomplete work would be finished during recess. Ms. D. also suggested “buddy reading,” where students would choose a partner to read with only after they had sufficiently worked through their designated three centers. The rules were quite simple. If and when a student completed the centers, he or she could find another student who was also finished and they could read their book boxes together. All my students especially enjoyed this time with each other. They were encouraged to help each other read through the books. This technique gave the strugglers more of an incentive to stay on task and at least try to complete their centers. However, I had to check their center work before they could buddy read.

I was happy to see this management technique was helping my students with literacy. The strugglers looked forward to reading to their classmates. The

books in their book boxes were on their level so they could read most of them with little or no help. The help they did need was eagerly accepted from their friends. I was becoming more relaxed as I watched them achieve newfound success, but I was not completely satisfied.

Just when I thought things were finally looking up, I encountered another obstacle. Several of my struggling students' parents explained how homework time was often a battle. I realized that I was sending work home that these students could not successfully complete. I was embarrassed and ashamed. I should have known better. I brought this new concern to my colleagues. A close friend of mine, who used discovery packs and reading folders with her third grade students, recommended that I try a version of them with my first graders.

Each discovery pack included a book and several activities to accompany the story. The reading folders consisted of leveled paper books along with phonics and comprehension activities. Both the packs and the folders were geared to specific academic levels. I didn't get a chance to try either of these strategies with my first graders. I was too afraid to let go of my traditional homework assignments. I guess it was just easier than trying something new. That was another mistake I lived to regret!

However, mistakes are how we learn and this September, as a new group of eager learners walked into my classroom, I greeted them as an eager teacher ready to effectively instruct each one of them. I no longer wanted to feel the guilt,

fear, or angst that was associated with my teaching. I wanted my students to enjoy school. I wanted them to be excited about learning. I did not want any of them to experience any negativity about education. Frustration, anxiety, and stress were no longer acceptable in my classroom. I was ready to explore and implement various instructional methods to meet the needs of any struggling first graders.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

I teach in a public school located on the edge of an urban city. Our school houses nearly 400 students, mainly from middle to low class families. I have 20 students in my first grade class. Eleven of the students are girls and nine are boys. Of the 20 learners, eight of them receive Title I services. Most of my students have parents who completed high school, but did not further their educations. Unfortunately, many of my students do not practice skills at home, such as sight words or decoding words. Purcell-Gates (2002) explained, “to learn all these basic concepts requires extensive experience with people using print, with people reading and writing around and to you and allowing you to try your hand at reading and writing” (p. 125).

Coping with my own past struggles of trying to academically meet the needs of all my students in my classes has encouraged me to research modifying my current curriculum. I wanted to make the students’ days in school valuable, even if the curriculum was above their current level. My struggling students did not acquire skills as quickly as the rest of the class. I wanted to use different ways to address the diverse needs of my students. I was excited to attempt a variety of strategies with my struggling students in order to determine what would work best for them, while still moving ahead with the rest of the class. I began by creating a question that would direct my investigation of how to revise my curriculum, “What will be the observed and reported experiences when I modify my current

literacy curriculum to meet the needs of my struggling first graders?" I planned my research study to determine which strategies worked best with struggling students based on their academic needs, such as phonological awareness, phonics, decoding, and fluency. In my study, I employed several strategies, including small group instruction, leveled centers, peer tutoring, and special leveled homework, such as reading folders and discovery packs. It was my goal to decrease frustration and increase success and enthusiasm during literacy instruction while narrowing the academic gap between the strugglers and their classmates.

Before I could officially begin my data collection, I submitted my research proposal to the Human Subjects Internal Review Board (HSIRB) at Moravian College. This board reviewed my application to guarantee my study's credibility and ethics. Their task was to ensure that my research study would keep the students safe and their data confidential. Once they approved my proposal (see Appendix A), I gave a consent form to my principal (see Appendix B), asking his permission to conduct my study. At this time, I also sent letters to my students' parents requesting their permission to use their children in my study (see Appendix C). Once I was granted permission from both my principal and all of the students' parents, I was able to formally collect the information I needed for my study.

As a teacher researcher doing an action research study, I collected data using the various qualitative methods (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The first method

of data I collected was field notes, which I turned into participant observations. I jotted down notes at least three times a week when my class was involved in some method or lesson of the literacy curriculum. My notes often focused on three struggling students. Later, I turned these notes into detailed accounts of the lessons or activities that we engaged in during literacy instruction. Since I was also an involved member in the lesson or activity with the students, these descriptions became participant observations (Arhar, Holly, & Kasten, 2001). I documented the students' behaviors, reactions, attitudes, and the difficulty level of the activity, as well as their enthusiasm and frustration. Soon after, as Ely, Vinz, Downing, and Anzul (1997) suggested, I added observer comments in brackets reflecting my thoughts and opinions on what I observed. All of these data were kept in an ongoing field log. My research log contained information about the children's reactions to new instructional methods, their frustration, and their enthusiasm.

I also conducted a semi-structured interview (see Appendix D) prior to the beginning of my research study. I questioned the entire class on their attitudes, feelings, and preferred learning styles when it came to literacy. This information would prove to be useful when planning my lessons. I wanted the students to feel comfortable, so I carried out the interview as a whole group discussion. I began with some pre-determined questions, but let the students' responses guide the interview. Most of the students wanted to be heard, so I allowed everyone to

speak at least once. As the children spoke and discussed, I wrote down their responses. They were not distracted by my note taking and seemed at ease with the interview. The students were anxious to participate.

The final form of data I collected was student work. According to Arhar, Holly, and Kasten (2001) student work helps the teacher provide evidence of student learning. I began with several beginning-of-the-year assessments. Early in September, I tested the entire class on the following skills: letter identification (see Appendix E), letter sounds (see Appendix F), writing the alphabet in order (see Appendix G), reading accuracy, and reading fluency. Our reading specialist also tested the students on their letter naming, nonsense word fluency, and word identification by using the DIBELS (Good & Kaminski, 2002) (see Appendix H). I used these data to determine which of my first graders were academically lower than the rest of the class. I could easily predict by these assessments who was going to struggle in the area of literacy. I conducted monthly assessments, such as wordlists (see Appendix I) and running records (see Appendix J), to determine if the struggling students' literacy skills were improving. I also gathered work samples that my struggling students completed during small group instruction or one-on-one instruction. All of this information helped me to uncover the students' progress in literacy, the direction in which I needed to take them, and what skills I needed to teach them.

The multiple assessment tools revealed whether or not the students were improving and/or gaining literacy skills. These data collection led directly to answering my research question. In order to safeguard the data I collected, my field log was kept secure and out of reach of the students. Pseudonyms were used to conceal the students' identities. I was the only person who had access to the students' real names and corresponding pseudonyms. At the conclusion of my study all collected data was destroyed.

It was very important to me to ensure trustworthiness when collecting data for my study. I also reviewed the research and literature concerning struggling students and literacy instruction. After careful consideration, I structured my study around what I had read and studied. By collecting various forms of data for three months, I was able to triangulate the information, gain multiple perspectives about my struggling first graders, and increase the credibility of the study (Arhar, Holly, & Kasten 2001). Participant observations and assessments were the primary factors in my data collection. I captured the students' actions, behaviors, attitudes, and the general atmosphere of the classroom through continual observations. Interviewing the students gave me a better understanding of the students' preferred learning styles and feelings about literacy. My data collection was done carefully and critically. As suggested by MacLean and Mohr (1999), I shared my data with a teacher support group and several colleagues. I gained their

perspectives on how my study was progressing and listened to their critical advice. I am confident that my research study is credible.

ANALYSIS

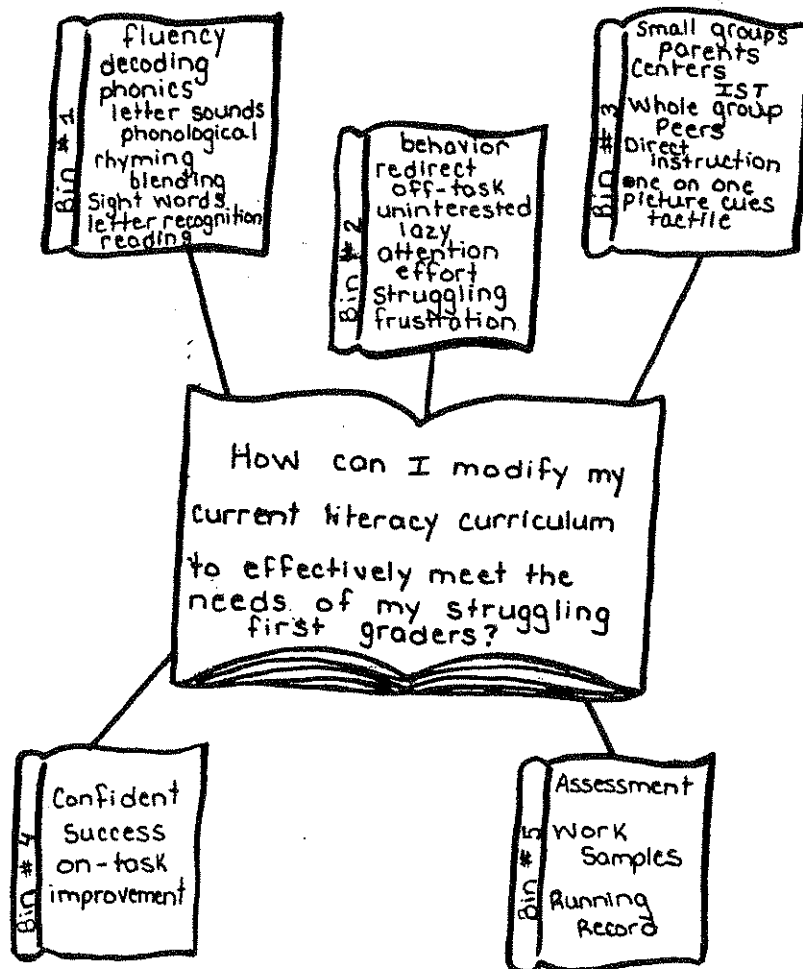
As a teacher action researcher, I began analyzing the data almost immediately. I reflected on my observations by writing observer comments in brackets. When I took notes, I wrote down my thoughts and feelings about what I was seeing. Later, when I re-read my field log, I added other reflections or ideas that were appropriate. By constantly reflecting on my data, I was able to decide which direction to take the study in order to provide the best experiences for my students. I also wrote analytic memos (Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul, 1997) to note important events that occurred while I was teaching or observing the students. I used these memos as a tool to guide my study and remind myself of the events in my classroom.

In the middle of my study, I coded my field notes. According to Ely, Vinz, Downing, and Anzul (1997) coding is a method of labeling the data in a field log. I re-read and scanned my field log entries and decided on a one or two word heading that summed up the major points in the data. I wrote these headings in the margins of the entries. For example, if I wrote about a phonics lesson, I wrote *PHONICS* in the margin.

Towards the end of my data collection, I took these codes and placed them into categories, or bins (Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul, 1997). I then created a graphic organizer, or web (see Figure 1), to assemble the data in a more

comprehensible display. The bins easily conveyed the patterns and relationships within the data collection. Once the bins were completed, I wrote theme statements that summarized the patterns and relationships in each bin (Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul, 1997). The theme statements formed a sketch of the findings in my study. I expanded on the bins and theme statements when I discussed the findings of my study.

Figure 1. Graphic Organizer: Bins and Codes



At the beginning of the study, I collected student assessments on their literacy abilities. Once I implemented new strategies and methods to teach the literacy curriculum to my strugglers, I conducted different assessments. I tried to assess the students at least once a month to determine if the students were improving and progressing. These assessments provided me with the information I needed to plan and organize my lessons.

I also used narrative forms to analyze my data. According to Ely, Vinz, Downing, and Anzul (1997), narrative forms are methods of examination and discovery of the data. I used *I stories*, and *a layered story*. These narratives helped me determine my students' feelings and attitudes about literacy. They also helped me to identify their strengths and weaknesses.

THE STORY BEGINS

First Day

The first day of school brings several anxieties for me as well as the students. I am very nervous, and I am sure the students are, too.

As I anticipated the arrival of the students, I wondered what this year would be like. I imagined a classroom filled with busy workers as the students worked to become independent readers, writers, and mathematicians. I heard the rapid footsteps of children rushing to their classrooms. Another year was beginning. I greeted each of the students at the door and welcomed them to first grade with a wide smile across my face. I directed them to their seats and pointed out the coloring sheet that awaited them. I encouraged them to color their papers the best they could.

Soon I noticed a little boy with blond hair and a pale face crying in the back of the room. I approached and asked, "Why are you crying?" He continued to cry and tried to catch his breath. He did not answer me. I took his hand as he wandered around the room looking for his nameplate and seat. I told Matty that it was okay to be sad, but that we were going to have lots of fun and learn many new things in first grade. He started to color his sheet as I handed him a tissue. Before I gathered my thoughts, I saw another boy, taller than Matty, with brown hair and big brown eyes, coming into the room very upset and distraught. I quickly approached him, but he appeared frightened. Instead of asking him what

was wrong, I assured him that he had nothing to be afraid of. “You are going to make many friends and have lots of fun this year,” I explained to him. We walked around to find his seat. Keith sat down and began to color his sheet. Once Keith was settled, I turned to find a little girl sitting quietly in her seat with tears streaming down her cheeks. She offered me an explanation to her current state by telling me that she missed her mommy. I assured her that the day would go by quickly and that she would have lots fun. I walked away from her and scoped out the rest of the class. All were in their seats busily coloring their sheets. I tried to catch my breath.

What had just happened here? Was it normal to have three students cry uncontrollably on the first day of school? I had criers before, but never this many. I worried at this point that this class may be very immature. Trying not to get ahead of myself by prejudging the students, I began my planned daily activities for the rest of the week. By Friday I was exhausted. I remembered feeling this way last year at the conclusion of my first week back to school, however this year something was different.

Insecurities, Issues, and Doubts

As the days turned into weeks, I realized that I truly had my hands full with this class. My students were highly energetic and somewhat disruptive. How was it that my class was stacked with several behavior issues? Could it be me? Was I not stern enough with the students? Was I too lenient with them? Why

could I not control them? What was I doing wrong? I was beginning to doubt my classroom management techniques and myself. I had never had this problem before. What was different this year? What was I missing?

I continued to teach, though, doubting my abilities. Finally, on a Wednesday afternoon, the librarian put my doubts to rest. She said that my students were very energetic, to put it nicely. I felt very reassured as I listened to these words. I was confident now that it was not me or the way I ran my classroom. The behavior problems were coming from the mix of students I had in my class. Instead of spending time trying to figure out how I happened to get this mix of students, I accepted my class for what it was and moved on. I went over the rules with them every day and they knew what I expected from them. I strictly enforced the rules, implemented the consequences, but misbehavior continued.

The Assessment Period

As September rolled on, assessment time approached. Wesson (1992) explained the importance of giving a variety of curriculum-based measurements in order to form instructional groups. He noted that the assessments give the teacher relevant and appropriate information for each group. Lessons could then be narrowed down to specific skills that the students needed to learn before they could move on to harder, more complex skills. Wesson reported that fewer students fell behind when this method was utilized. The assessments I used provided me with a wealth of information. Vygotsky (1978) stated, "The zone of

proximal development defines those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation” (p. 86). From these assessments, I knew almost immediately who would be my struggling students who needed to develop several skills and those who would work through first grade with little to no problems. I evaluated the students’ knowledge of letter recognition, letter sounds, and writing the alphabet in order. Our reading specialist conducted a DIBELS assessment, which evaluated letter naming, word identification, and nonsense word fluency. As I looked over the scores on each piece, I could tell that I had a bright class. They did better than I expected and knew more than I thought they would. They were clearly above average for beginning first grade. As I continued through the assessment tools, I found that I did in fact have three students who struggled and were academically below the rest of the class.

Matty, Davey, and Keith were my struggling first graders. Although the entire class were my participants, these three were the focus of my research study. Matty and Keith were new to the district this year. They were the two boys who cried on the first day. Davey, a tall boy with glasses and a Mohawk, repeated kindergarten last year. All three boys were having trouble with skills that should have been mastered last year. They were the three who would require the most attention from me until I could narrow the academic gap between them and their classmates. The following passages were written in the students’ points of view. These *I Stories* help to clarify the students’ feelings and attitudes about literacy.

The Struggling Students

A Glimpse of Matty

Why does she make us write our last names? I don't know my last name. Boy, I'm glad that she gave us these nameplates. I wouldn't be able to write my name without it. I'm really glad that the alphabet is above the chalkboard. I need it to write my letters and remember which is which. I hope she doesn't call on me for anything. What if I don't know the answer? Maybe if I raise my hand she and the rest of the class will think I know the answer. But what if she calls on me? I know...I'll just tell her I forgot what I was going to say. Oh no, it's time for reading again. Why do we have to do this every day? Doesn't she know that I don't know how to read? I could read, I just can't remember the sounds of the letters. They get all mixed up in my head. I can't keep them straight. There are too many. And writing, I really don't like writing. I wish I didn't have to do it at all, but she makes us. I can draw the picture, but I can't write the words to go with it because I don't know how to spell. Maybe if I try really hard, I'll get better at all these things. Maybe if I do what she says, I'll learn to read. I really want to learn to read.

Matty had trouble writing his alphabet in order. He only named 43 of 54 letters (capital and lower case). He identified 11 out of 33 total letter sounds. He was the lowest of the three.

A Glimpse of Davey

School stinks! I wish my mom wouldn't make me go. I had to be in kindergarten twice. I should know more than the rest of kids in my class, but I don't. I try to pay attention, but I can't help it when my mind thinks about other things. I get bored so easily. This stuff is too hard for me. Reading and writing, I just can't do it. Why can't Miss Lanni understand that? Why won't she leave me alone? I wish she would just stop pushing. I get so angry when she tells me to do something I can't do, like read a story or those dumb phonics worksheets. Maybe if I hide my head or put it down, she'll ignore me. I know I shouldn't argue with her, but I can't help it. I know I shouldn't slam my hands on my table, but I can't help it. Why can't she understand that I just don't get it!

Davey named 51 of the 54 letters correctly and identified 23 of the 33 letter sounds correctly. He had trouble writing the alphabet in order. Though Davey's results did not seem extremely low, I had to remember that he did repeat kindergarten, and these are kindergarten skills. This raised a red flag. Could Davey be a candidate for a learning disability?

A Glimpse of Keith

I didn't want to come to this school. I went to three schools last year. Why couldn't I just stay at one of those? Why did my mom have to keep moving us around? I guess it's not so bad now. I made some friends. I still can't read or write. I don't really like to do those things either. I hate doing my homework and

practicing those dumb words Miss Lanni sends home every week. Nobody ever helps me at home. My mom works late and my grandparents are too tired to help me. I guess I should do my homework at daycare, but I would rather play. I'll just do it in the morning when I get to school. I'm tired a lot at school. Why does school have to start so early? I try to put my head down on the table, but Miss Lanni tells me I'm not allowed to. I'll just sit here and listen. I'm too tired to do anything else. When she tells me to read, I do it if it isn't too hard. If it is too hard, I don't do anything. She tells me I have to try harder, but I am too tired. This is boring anyway. I would rather be playing with my friends or doing a puzzle.

Keith went to several schools last year. He had little consistency in his life. He bounced back and forth between mom's house and dad's house. I worried that this would continue to affect him emotionally and academically. He named 50 of the 54 letters correctly. He knew 17 of the 33 letter sounds. Keith's home life played a role in his struggles. He didn't return homework or practice reading skills at home. He traveled between baby-sitter as well as Mom and Dad's house.

Running Records

I completed running records on my students. Valencia and Buly (2004) recommended conducting one-on-one reading assessments to gather information about students' reading abilities, such as word accuracy, comprehension, and fluency. As Matty, Davey, and Keith read different leveled books, I took notes on their reading behaviors and word accuracy. The book I chose for them was on a

kindergarten level. The book was entirely too hard for Matty. He did not know the letters or their sounds, but I wanted to get an idea of how he approached a book. He read with his head down and mumbled through it. He used the pictures to construct meaning. I prompted Matty to use his finger to follow the words. He needed to work on one-to-one correspondence. He read the book following a pattern, but got all confused as soon as the word pattern changed. I knew I had a long way to go with him.

Next I read with Keith. He also had a difficult time with this book. However, the difference between Matty and Keith was that Matty tried his best and got very frustrated. Keith, on the other hand, gave very little effort. He looked to me for recognition after he read each word. He rubbed his head as if he was uninterested. I believed that Keith could do much better if he put forth a bit more effort. I was going to have to really push him to do his very best.

Finally, I read with Davey. Like Matty, Davey tried his hardest and easily got frustrated. He held his head while reading and his face usually turned red. At a meeting, Davey's mother had told me that he believed he should be able to do this since he is older than the others and was in kindergarten twice. Davey's Mom also told me that he gets embarrassed easily and does not want to disappoint me. He needed a lot of reassurance from me this year.

Introduction of My Study

Soon the end of September approached, and I pondered over my students. I came up with several thoughts and/or predictions: 1. Behavior was going to be a huge issue all year; 2. the majority of my class was on level; 3. the gap between my three strugglers and their classmates was very wide.

The time had come to send home consent forms for my research study to the students' parents. Before I did this, I explained my study to the children. We sat in a circle on the carpet, and I explained my study in terms they would understand. I explained to them that I was a student, too, who needed their help to complete a project. I expected some questions, but they did not ask any. I explained that I wanted to try new methods of teaching literacy in order for them to be successful readers. For example, I told them we would try different ways to learn letter sounds and improve their reading behaviors. This was a quick discussion because the class did not have any responses to what I had to say. They did, however, think it was very cool that I was a student like them. Next, I read to them the Parent Consent Form that they needed to take home and get signed. I explained that these forms were very important, and their parents must sign them as soon as possible. The students put the forms in their folders without asking any questions. That day I also gave a consent form to the principal. He granted me permission to conduct my study by signing the form. He expressed an interest in my research by saying, "This will provide you with good information. You might

even be able to bring the strategies you use to the Instructional Support Team.” I was excited that he showed such an interest.

Class Interview

Now that my students were aware of my study, I conducted a class interview on reading attitudes and opinions. The students were more than willing to participate and answered my questions with enthusiasm. I was quite amused that the majority of the students felt that reading was easy. Though it came easy to several of them, it did not to most of them. All three strugglers said they like reading. Davey said it was fun. Keith liked the pictures, and Matty liked to learn. Keith also told us that reading was easy because the words are easy. Davey quickly agreed. Matty said reading was hard because he did not know how to do it.

When I asked if the students preferred whole group or small group instruction, I got an interesting response. The class was split in half on this issue. Keith and Davey preferred small group instruction. This was good because we would do a lot of this. Matty liked whole group better because it was fun. He could not tell why he thought it was fun though. When I asked about reading at home, several students told me their parents help them to read, usually at night before bed. I praised them for this behavior and encouraged them to continue it. Interestingly, there was no response from Keith, Matty, or Davey. I wondered if

their parents considered my suggestions about how to assist their children in the area of literacy.

Throughout the entire interview, Davey was distracted. He constantly looked around the room to see what was going on. I redirected him, but that did not last very long and I had to do it again. I interrupted myself several times to redirect him. Matty was acting silly. He wiggled around in his seat. He lay on the table. How would I ever get through to these kids? Was it possible that their immaturity had an effect on their academic struggles? If so, how would I help them overcome that?

A Whole Group Lesson

Since all the students benefited from phonics instruction, I taught it to the students in a whole group setting. The focus of today's lesson was *short a*, a skill that was taught last year. I wanted Davey, Matty, and Keith to sit close to where I was teaching. I rearranged some seats on the carpet. We began the lesson by studying Ashley's name. Her name begins with *short a*. All three boys had their eyes on me. We chanted and spelled Ashley's name, emphasizing the *short a*. Next, the students had to listen to me recite *short a* words. I wanted them to tell me in which part of the word they heard the *short a*, the beginning, the middle, or the end. First I said "map". Several hands went up. I called on a little girl. She replied, "The *a* is in the middle." "Very good!" I answered. Next I gave the word "alligator". Matty raised his hand. I called on him and he answered, "The *a* is at

the end.” “No, Matty, that is incorrect. Listen again. Alligator.” (I emphasized the *short a* sound.) He replied, “I don’t know where it is.” I was upset that he answered incorrectly, but I commended his efforts. Another student gave the correct answer. I continued with this listening game. All the students responded with correct answers. Matty did not volunteer again. I felt sad for him. Was he discouraged or frustrated? On a whim, I said the word “cap” and called on Matty. “Where do you hear the *short a* sound?” He answered with, “It’s in the middle.” Yes! I gave him lots of praise and recognition. I was left wondering, did he understand *short a* or was that just a good guess.

Next we tried to rhyme words. I said “cat” and the students needed to reply with a rhyming word. Keith, looking excited and smiling, raised his hand. I called on him and he responded with “mat”. Very Good Keith! Next I said “nap”. Matty raised his hand so I called on him. He did not give me an answer. “Matty, what word rhymes with nap?” “I don’t know them,” he answered. Why did this child raise his hand and volunteer to give an answer if he had no idea what the answer was? I was afraid to call on him again because I did not want him to be embarrassed. I was very confused by this child.

Several whole group lessons went this way. Matty tried to participate, but he seldom had a correct answer. Keith and Davey only volunteered if they knew they had a correct answer, which was very rare. They were easily distracted and I struggled to keep their attention. Kamps et al. (2003) found that schools that used

only whole group instruction promoted higher rates of failure. The researchers also stated that those students who did not spend time in small group instruction continued to struggle with reading. Tomlinson (2000) concurred by stating that instruction should be differentiated in order to meet the needs of all the students in the classroom. The lessons and activities must be designed with the students in mind. The curriculum must be clear and tasks must be meaningful to the students. Finally, learning must be fun and satisfying for the students. The next step in my curriculum was to instruct these boys in a small group setting.

Small Group Instruction

I looked at the three boys' academic needs and decided what lessons to teach them. I created a schedule where I met with the boys while the other students worked at centers. Chard (2000) found that small group instruction to teach phonics and blending was effective for struggling readers when the group did not exceed three students. When this type of small group instruction time increased within a classroom, she reported, oral reading fluency improved. The phonics focus for the week was *short e*. The boys and I practiced phoneme segmentation. We used -en and -et word families. I started with *men* and asked the students to separate the sounds. "With your fist say /m/. With your other fist say /en/. Now put your fists and the sounds together. What word do you get?" Davey and Keith both replied with "men." Once the boys heard the word, I asked them to write it on a white board. Davey and Keith got very excited when they

blended and wrote the words correctly. Matty wrote the words down, but could not blend or segment the sounds. During the lesson, I noticed Matty was not writing the words on his own. I asked him to stop and encouraged him to try writing the words on his own. He was looking at the other boys' boards and copying what he saw. We continued segmenting and writing for the following words *pen*, *Ben*, *ten*, and *hen*. We then worked through the other word family using the words *bet*, *pet*, *get*, and *let*. To culminate the activity, the boys completed a workbook page where they needed to write the word for the picture. Matty struggled with this entire lesson. This lesson was clearly too difficult for Matty since he needed constant redirection to stay on task. Keith and Davey were both successful with segmenting and writing *short e* words. Matty still had difficulty with his letters and sounds.

I continued using small group instruction with Davey and Keith. We started doing guided reading three times a week. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) described the importance of an intense literacy program. They explained that small group instruction should be designed to meet the needs of all the students. In these small groups, the researchers reported, strugglers would benefit from the support of group members as well as the teacher. The goal of guided reading was to make every student a competent, independent, and happy literacy user. I observed that Keith and Davey were comfortable with blending sounds for words in isolation. They were ready to try a book. During our first session, I used a

kindergarten level book, *Little Brother*. Short (1999) explained how she moved away from teaching isolated skills to developing reading strategies. Her struggling students learned strategies to read, and gained fluency by reading and by being surrounded by readers. I showed the boys how to sound out a word they did not know by tapping out or finger spelling the sounds and sweeping them together. I urged the boys to use these strategies. They were reluctant. They looked at me and waited every time they got stuck on a word. They wanted me to give them the word as soon as they were stumped. I refused and encouraged them to use other cues, such as the pictures, to figure out the word. The boys struggled and I saw the frustration building in their faces. They held and rubbed their faces. Kohl (2002) stated, "It wasn't me that was making their faces turn away but the very idea of school performance, of having to expose their knowledge or lack of it in front of other children in the class" (p. 148). I didn't want them to take risks they were not ready to take. I needed them to be comfortable with the work we did so they would not shy away from it. Therefore, at our next guided reading session, I chose a *short a* decodable text for the boys to read. It was easier for them because all the words could be sounded out. We read and reread the story in order for the boys to gain fluency and confidence. Aiex (1990) explained how positive attitudes were formed when children's literature was used during instruction. The researcher described how her strugglers were more motivated when using authentic literature as compared to the traditional basal. Davey and Keith were

less frustrated and enjoyed the book. They were full of smiles. I told them to put the books in their book boxes and I encouraged the students to read them as many times as they liked. I wanted them to reread books they were successful with to build their confidence and enthusiasm, as well as fluency. Aiech (1990) explained that children who are enthusiastic about reading in early grades would continue to develop competence.

Individual Instruction

Matty was not ready for guided reading. During writing time, I pulled Matty back to my table to work with me individually. I quizzed him on letter sounds using flashcards. He did not know H, N, Q, G, W, and Y. For this type of student, Valencia and Buly (2004) recommended intensive, systematic word /letter identification, and letter sound understanding instruction targeted at beginning reading skills. Similarly, Greenwood, Tapia, Abbott, and Walton (2003) suggested practicing phonemic awareness skills by drilling letter sounds and blending words. Matty was not yet ready to blend words, however, he did need to drill the letter sounds. At our next meeting we worked on the letter G. I had Matty look through a magazine to find pictures that start with the /g/. He immediately said "I can't find any!" We looked at each page together. I said, "I see one!" Then he looked on the page for the picture. I said "glass." He said, "Yeah that has a G." He then paged through the magazine and found *grass* and *gate*. On another page there was a picture of a globe. I didn't think he knew what

it was so I said, “globe.” Matty said, “/g/, /g/, yeah that has a G.” He was so proud of himself, smiling happily. He said he liked the activity because he could cut and glue pictures. Throughout the week we continued to work on/g/. Matty completed “Goat’s Garden.” He had to find the pictures on the paper that began with /g/. Once he found the pictures he had to color, cut, and glue them onto the goat’s garden. He completed this project independently and successfully. The final activity for the letter G was a booklet. While he was coloring each of the pictures, I could hear him say /g/, /g/. Once the booklet was complete, I had him read it several times. Matty and I did several similar activities for other letter sounds. Once Matty mastered all of his letter sounds, I moved him to blending, and eventually guided reading.

Peer Tutors

As another strategy to meet their needs, I paired the three strugglers with peer tutors. I matched Matty with Darrell, a top achiever in my class. Darrell gave a letter sound and Matty had to write the letter on a white board. I sat nearby to observe. The boys worked well together. Matty only made one mistake, the letter Q. When Darrell said, /q/, Matty wrote an X. This was a good activity for Matty. Darrell was a good tutor. He was always willing to help Matty whenever he needed it. Matty looked up to Darrell, so this match up was perfect.

I paired Davey with Anne to work on letter sound relationships. Anne recited CVC words with a *short a* pattern and Davey wrote the words on a white

board. He hesitated before writing. I noticed that Davey wrote the first and the last letter of the word first and then filled in the *a*. As Anne read down the list of words, Davey caught on to the CVC pattern and started writing faster. He had the most trouble with the final sounds. I was confident that he understood this skill. At the conclusion of the word list, I had Davey read a decodable text to Anne. It was titled *Pat the Cat*. The focus was *short a* words. Mathes (2001) suggested using peer-assisted strategies to enhance reading performance. She recommended having pairs read decodable texts to practice phonological awareness. However, the match-up was not the best choice. Anne was easily frustrated by Davey's inaccuracy and pace. She was also more bossy than helpful. I didn't pair these two together again.

I paired Keith with Wendy to work on these same skills. Wendy liked to help her classmates. She felt honored to help out. Keith and Wendy worked well together, and Keith did very well on these words. He didn't make any mistakes. He picked up the CVC pattern almost immediately. They worked through the list of words quickly and accurately. I paired them together again to work on different skills. Keith was a student who was difficult to motivate. Peer tutoring seemed to work for him. He worked easily for Wendy. This was one of the only ways to motivate him to do his best. Keith started doing better, and Wendy became my right hand.

Centers

At first during center time the boys wasted time and got into trouble. In order to stop this from occurring I created special centers that would provide the boys with work on their level. I observed the boys at several centers.

I wanted Davey and Keith to work on their word wall words, or sight words. I had a magnetic word wall in the rear of my room. On it were the five word cards we were working on for the week and the five word cards from the previous week. The boys had to use magnetic letters to spell the words. They put the letters right under the cards. This was good practice for the boys. They could recognize most words in isolation, but still needed repetition of these sight words. For the most part, they were successful. They easily matched the magnetic letters with the letters on the cards to spell the words correctly. They finished the work, but were silly and needed me to redirect them at times. This center was not too hard for them, and I believed it to be beneficial for them. However, these two boys did not work well together without me. Their behavior got in the way of their academic focus. I did not pair them together again.

Matty's center was different. Until he had his letter sounds mastered, I had him work at centers that focused on this skill. I gave Matty an ABC puzzle. He had to connect a picture to the letter it started with. For example, Matty had to connect a picture of a rainbow with the letter *R*. In order to do this he needed to hear the initial letter sounds and identify the letter. He began by carefully laying

out several picture pieces. When Matty pulled out the picture of a *zipper*, I heard him say /z/. The next picture was of an *x-ray*. He said, "Oohh an *X-ray*." He caught me watching him and said, "Miss Lanni, this game is easy." Matty then started to put the letter pieces in a pile. I worried he was going to get off track, so I intervened. "Matty, what are you doing?" He replied, "I am looking for the *N*." "Matty, why don't you spread the pieces out on the floor? Then it will be easier to find the piece you need." "Oh, okay," he answered. Matty continued to spread the letter pieces out on the floor. He was spending too much time on this task and not enough time on matching the letters to the pictures. Matty needed constant redirection from me to stay on task. I had to keep reminding him to pick a picture and find the letter that goes with it.

At the end of 20 minutes, Matty successfully matched 14 pictures and letters together. They were S, D, L, V, Z, O, U, R, C, W, M, G, and Q. I then asked him to point to each letter and picture and tell me the name of the letter. He named all 14 letters correctly. Then I asked him to point to each letter and say the sound. He did not know the sounds for W, Q, and G. When I asked Matty to clean up the center, he replied. "Sure. That was fun Miss Lanni." These were the sounds that we worked on later either in small group or one on one.

At a similar center, Matty had to sort pictures under their initial sound. For example, he would need to put a picture of a *banana* under the letter *B*. Initial sounds *J, K, R, V, W, and Z* were the focus of this center. Matty said the words of

each picture before he tried to sort them. He got to a picture of a *witch*. He said, “Miss Lanni, this is a *witch*, but there’s no *Y*. Where’s the *Y*?” Talia, who was working at another center, piped in. “It’s not a *Y* word. Listen, Matty, /w/. It’s a *W*.” He put the picture under the *W*. Talia went back to work at her center. Matty continued to say the names of the pictures and sort them under the correct initial sounds. He did not need any help with this center. Once he figured out the difference between *Y* and *W*, he was accurate. Later Keith joined Matty. He too had no difficulties with this center. The boys seemed to enjoy this center. They smiled and worked well together. They experienced success, which was one of my goals. This center may have been too easy for Keith, but review of letter sounds was good practice for both of them.

Layered Story: Whole Group Phonics Lesson

Matty

Miss Lanni gave us another book to read. She passed them out so we each had one to read. I was glad that Wendy sits next to me at my table. I knew if I couldn’t read it that she would help me out. She likes to help me. I looked at the book and got excited. I could read the title all by myself. It said *Look at That*. That was an easy one. Those were all word wall words. It’s a good thing I practiced my words at night with my grandma.

Miss Lanni called on Tammy to read first. She is a good reader. When she was done reading, Miss Lanni called on Darrell to read. He is the best reader in

the class. I want to read just like him. I wonder if I will ever be able to. While he was reading I kept my eyes in the book and followed along. Miss Lanni always told us to follow along. She got mad when we didn't, so I made sure I always did. Next, it was Davey's turn to read. He did okay reading too. He made two mistakes. He didn't know the word *all*. I knew that one because it was a word wall word. He got stuck on the word *cloud* too. I didn't know that one either. I looked at the pictures and took a guess at the word. I raised my hand and asked if the word was *cloud*. I was right! I did it! I remembered to use the pictures like Miss Lanni taught us. She looked surprised, but she smiled a lot so I think she was proud of me.

More of my classmates read different pages in the book. They all read so good. Keith got to read the last page. He didn't make any mistakes. I wish I could read without making any mistakes. Miss Lanni said that he did great. I want to do great. It was time for us to reread the story by our tables. Everyone at the table read one page together until the book is finished. Miss Lanni said we all did good reading. She asked us some questions about the book. She asked, what did the boy see in the clouds so I raised my hand. I knew the answer. It was a *cat, a hat, a pan, and a man*. I told Miss Lanni that those words rhymed. She asked some more questions and other kids answered them. Then she wanted to know what "clouds play" mean. I raised my hand and stretched out toward her. I didn't want her to miss me. I really wanted to answer the question. She called on me and I answered

it correctly. I knew I was right. Miss Lanni ended the lesson and we all put the books into our book boxes. I liked this book. It was easier than the other books. I could read this one. I didn't need Wendy to help me. I did it all by myself. I followed along just like she said and I knew most of the words. Finally! Maybe soon I'll be able to read like Darrell.

Keith

It was time to read again. Miss Lanni was handing out a book. It was called *Look at That*. That was an easy title. I knew it because the title was all word wall words. I practiced them at night sometimes. It is hard for me to remember all of them, but I knew the words in the title. I looked through the book at the pictures. It looked like it was going to be a good book. I hope Miss Lanni doesn't call on me. I don't feel like reading today. I would rather listen to my classmates read it. I'm too tired. Maybe if I sit here with my head down, she won't call on me.

So far she called on Tammy and Darrell to read. Next she called on my buddy, Davey to read. He did pretty good I guess. I heard Miss Lanni tell him to use the pictures to figure out the word he was stuck on. Other kids in the room had their hands up to tell the word. I couldn't try to figure it out because I didn't know which word he was on. It didn't matter. If Davey couldn't get it, then she'd call on someone with his or her hand up. I was safe. She wouldn't call on me.

Davey eventually figured out the word by looking at the pictures. Good for him. I could do that too.

Whew! Only a few more pages left. If I didn't raise my hand, she wouldn't call on me. I kept sitting in my seat with my head down. I should have followed along like she always told us, but I was just too tired. I didn't think she was paying attention to what I was doing. I was wrong. Just as soon as I thought I was free, she called on me to read the last page. Oh boy! She caught me not paying attention. I thought I was in big trouble, but she didn't yell at me. She just wanted me to read. I read the page without making any mistakes. Whew! That was easy. All the words but one were word wall words. The last word, *rain*, was a hard one, but I looked at the pictures like Davey did and took a good guess. She said I did a great job.

Then we had to read by table. I rested on my table with my head down and mumbled through the book. When we were finished, Miss Lanni asked a bunch of questions. I didn't raise my hand to answer any. I didn't really know any of the answers since I wasn't really paying attention. I wanted to pay attention, but I was just too tired.

Davey

It was time to read again. It won't be so bad. Since Miss Lanni moved my seat so I am sitting at her table, I felt better about reading aloud. She helped me when I got stuck on words. She had to keep reminding me to follow along in the

book. I tried to, but the next thing I knew I was drawing on my pencil box or playing with my pencil. I wanted to follow along, but I couldn't help myself from moving around. Tammy and Darrell read perfectly like they always do. How did they get so good? Then she called on me to read. I don't want to read after them. They're so good at it and I'm not. I put my hand on my head so no one could see me. I didn't want my class to see me struggle. I got stuck on a-l-l. I had no idea what it was. I sighed several times so Miss Lanni would know that I didn't know the word. Finally, she called on someone else to give the word. She said that *all* was a word wall word. My mom makes me practice those words at night, but I can't remember them. There are too many. I kept reading, but then got stuck on c-l-o-u-d-s. Again I tried to sigh, but Miss Lanni made me look at the pictures to figure out the word. It took me awhile and I kept my face covered so my classmates couldn't see me. Finally I whispered *clouds*. Yes! I got it! Miss Lanni said to say it louder so I did. It was over. I finished the page. I was exhausted. It takes so much effort for me to get through one page. Will it ever get easier?

She called on other kids to read the rest of the book. They all did good, even my buddy Keith. He got stuck on one word but he used the pictures like me to figure it out. Then it was time to reread the book by tables. I like when we read this way. More than one person reads at a time and no one can hear me read slowly or make mistakes. I wish we would read like this all the time. I don't have to cover my face when we read this way.

Miss Lanni asked us questions about the story. I didn't really pay attention. I was drawing on my pencil box. I made a really cool picture. I couldn't wait until we were done with this book so I could show Keith my picture. All of a sudden I noticed Matty jumping out of his seat. I guess he wanted to answer a question. Why did he have to act like that? What a show off! He wasn't even a good reader. Oh well, who cared? I went back to playing with my pencil and drawing on my box. I was glad that Miss Lanni didn't call on me to answer any of the questions. I wondered if she knew that I didn't know any of the answers. I couldn't help myself. I tried to do what she asked of me, but I couldn't pay attention. I didn't know what to do. Should I tell her that I tried but couldn't help it? Did she know? Finally the lesson was over and we were done with the book. Miss Lanni told us to put the books in our book boxes.

FINDINGS

At the beginning of my study through multiple assessment tools, I found three students, Matty, Davey, and Keith, who struggled with many literacy skills ranging from phonological awareness, such as rhyming, to blending sounds together to read words. Upon entering first grade these students did not master all letter names or letter sounds. Matty had 11 letter sounds mastered and was able to identify 43 letters. Davey had 23 letter sounds mastered and was able to name 51 letters correctly. Keith had mastered 17 letter sounds and was able to identify 50 letters. Because of this lack in basic skills, these students experienced difficulty with phonics skills, namely decoding. They could not sound out three letter words with a consonant vowel consonant pattern, such as c-a-p. Therefore, the boys could not read orally, fluently. When first given a book to read, the boys had different reactions. Matty mumbled through it pretending to read, Davey got frustrated with the text and quit, and Keith barely attempted the story at all. Sight words also proved to be a struggle for these students. They were taught 36 words in kindergarten, but had not committed the words to memory. When given in isolation, Matty couldn't read or identify any of the words, and Davey and Keith could identify and read less than half. From the beginning, these three boys were academically lower than the rest of my first graders and had a long way to go to catch up.

These same students displayed behavioral issues when working on higher-level skills, such as blending, segmenting, decoding, and reading. They were often off task and needed a lot of redirection from me to stay focused on the activity at hand. Matty was squirmy and had trouble sitting still. Davey was often staring into space or watching other students, while Keith tried to talk and distract his classmates. This usually occurred during whole group literacy instruction. The boys often appeared uninterested as they lay with their heads down or played with their pencils. They put forth very little effort and rarely volunteered or participated in whole group lessons. When called on, the boys did their best to answer my questions, but rarely had the correct answers. Davey was often embarrassed and hid his head with his hands when he did not know an answer. Matty and Keith did not appear to be affected by making mistakes; however they still did not take risks by volunteering. When working on independent tasks, such as a phonics worksheet, these strugglers were frequently out of their seats walking around either to the garbage can, the water fountain, or to me for help. They were often very talkative and bothersome to their classmates. The boys' lack of attention to and avoidance of these lessons and activities led me to believe they were just being lazy. I constantly had to encourage them to try their best. However, I observed their struggles and frustrations as they sighed or made faces when the material got too difficult for them.

Several of the instructional teaching methods that I have implemented provided positive learning experiences for my struggling students. Once I determined the academic levels and needs of the students, I formed lessons to teach in a small group setting. Johnson (1998) explained the importance of the teacher entering the day well prepared and eager to apply the best instructional practices in order to get the best results from the students. In this setting it was easier to meet their needs. Initially, I met with the three boys. However, Matty's needs were different from Davey's and Keith's. His needs were more basic. Therefore, I chose to meet with him separately. When I met with Keith and Davey, we covered such skills as phonics, namely vowel sounds, blending, and decoding. We eventually moved on to reading decodable books and tried to build their fluency. At first Keith and Davey continued to struggle, but with my direct instruction and attention, their frustrations and struggle melted away. They continued to need my constant encouragement. Soon the boys were able to blend consonant vowel consonant words, but very slowly and inconsistently. Sometimes they confused vowel sounds, which indicated that these sounds were not yet mastered. While reading books, I prompted the boys to use the pictures to help them figure out words they did not know and could not read. This strategy took awhile, but eventually the boys took to this approach and used it often. Davey and Keith gained more literacy skills, such as phonics and decoding. Overall, they showed improvement, but were still far behind their classmates.

I worked with Matty one-on-one. While the other students were doing writing workshop, I asked Matty to sit with me at my table. Together we worked on basic skills such as letter names and letter sounds. We played alphabet games and used other tactile activities as I tried to reinforce these skills. At first our time together did not seem to be working. Matty did not remember skills we worked on day to day. He got frustrated, but never gave up and continued to try. Eventually he started picking up on skills and remembered the letter names and letter sounds. He got very excited, was motivated, and asked to learn more. I did not want to move him too quickly, so we continued to move slowly. Matty needed direct instruction and one-on-one attention in order to learn these basic skills. After a lot of review and repetition, Matty learned and mastered all of his letter names and sounds, including the five vowels.

Once Matty mastered these basic skills, he was ready to join the other boys in small group instruction. He quickly caught on to blending sounds and decoding words. Davey and Keith showed Matty how to use picture cues to construct meaning from a text and figure out words he did not know. The boys were motivated by each other. Though these strugglers were no longer non-readers, they remained lower than their classmates. Matty, who began academically the lowest of the three boys, acquired the most skills and was doing the best out of the three of them. While Davey and Keith considered reading a drag and something they really had to work at, Matty's improvement encouraged

and inspired him to do even better. Aiesz (1990) discovered that children who are enthusiastic about reading in the early grades would continue to develop competence. This would be true for Matty.

When paired well with peers, all three boys were successful. They worked with their classmates to review skills that we worked on in small group or one-on-one. Mostly, the boys, with their peer tutor, worked on phonics and decoding skills. Sometimes, I had Davey, Keith, and Matty read a book to their partner. Greenwood et al. (2003) found an increase in reading performance when peers were paired for reading. Mathes (2001) found similar results from her students when using peer-assisted strategies. The boys liked this practice the best. They enjoyed showing off their newfound reading abilities. The tutors were receptive to the boys' abilities. They were patient and willing to help them when they started to struggle or get frustrated. Peer tutoring was a positive learning experience because my strugglers had an opportunity to work with their classmates and take a break from each other and me. They also got to witness reading behaviors of students who were academically on or above level. During this time together, the students did their best work and learned from it.

During center time the boys were somewhat successful. They completed the activities with little struggle or confusion. However, sometimes they got off task and needed redirection from me to stay focused and complete the center. I continued to use the centers because their primary purpose was to reinforce skills

that I had taught to the struggling students. Their needs were being met in these specially designed centers and they needed as much reinforcement as I could give them. The boys changed their attitudes about center time. They enjoyed it and weren't frustrated anymore. This time spent on literacy skills that were geared at the students' levels proved to be constructive and valuable as we worked on closing the academic gap between Davey, Keith, Matty, and their classmates.

It was becoming clear to me that as the students gained literacy skills through these new strategies, they became more concerned about their learning. Their confidence was growing more and more everyday. The strugglers became self-motivated and enjoyed my praise. They became more independent when working on literacy activities and stayed on task more often. Their accuracy when reading was much better, and Keith, Davey, and Matty could read primer books independently. This is a level between kindergarten and first grade. Their decoding skills improved, and they were more successful when reading books. During guided reading, the boys and I used a slightly harder book to increase their reading behaviors. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) found that once children gained competence, they extended and sophisticated their literacy skills. They continued to use the strategies I taught them in small group instruction. They finally gained the necessary skills to become lifelong readers.

Towards the conclusion of this study, I used various assessments and work samples, which provided valuable information on students' progress. The first was a blending test where the students had to listen to me give three isolated sounds in a word (see Appendix K). They had to say the words. The students did not see the words as I said each sound slowly. For example, I said /b/ /a/ /t/ and the students had to respond with "bat". This test was done on an individual basis. Matty scored perfectly on the test. He correctly said all twelve words. Davey made three mistakes, "dog, hen, and last". He got nine out of the twelve correct. This was a significant increase. He could not blend sounds at all before. He improved 75%. Keith made one mistake on "cup". He, too, made great progress on this skill. He said eleven out of twelve words correctly. He scored a 92%.

The next assessment was consonant sounds test. This was a written assessment that the class took all at the same time (see Appendix L). The students looked at a picture and had to write the letter that began each word. For example, for a picture of a mouse the students had to write the letter M. There was a small portion on this test where the students had to print the final consonant sound for a picture. Matty scored an 87% on this test. This was an enormous accomplishment for him. Matty improved his letter sound knowledge by 54%. Davey scored an 84%, improving his letter sound knowledge by 14%. Keith scored an 86% on the test; an improvement of 34%. All three boys demonstrated noteworthy progress.

Our reading specialist, Mrs. H conducted a second DIBELS test (see Appendix M) to determine the boys' progress. This test assessed nonsense word fluency. The benchmark score for first graders is 55 words per minutes (wpm). Matty's score was 19 wpm on the test the first time he took it in the beginning of October. At the end of November his score was 38 wpm. He increased his nonsense word fluency by 34% (see Figure 2). This was a colossal jump for Matty. Davey' score in October was 38 wpm. In November he increased his score by one word per minute (see Figure 3). In October Keith's score was 29 wpm. He also increased his score by one word when he took the test in November (see Figure 4). This was not as big of an improvement as I would have liked to see. This measurement told me that I had to keep working on this skill with the boys in order for them to reach benchmark. However, Davey, and Keith needed the most practice with nonsense word fluency.

My goal for this study was to meet the needs of my struggling students through various forms of instruction. Collinson (2000) found that when teachers used several instructional approaches, students improved their performances and attitudes about learning. I tried to help these students gain literacy skills and increase their motivation and enthusiasm towards literacy through small group and individual instruction, centers, and peer tutoring. Matty, Keith, and Davey have shown a vast improvement. Though the boys still remain behind their peers academically, they are definitely narrowing the gap.

Figure 2. Matty's scores on the DIBELS test

Figure 3. Davey's scores on the DIBELS test

Figure 4. Keith's scores on the DIBELS test

**ACTION RESEARCH CONTINUES:
QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER EXAMINATION**

The three strugglers, Matty, Davey, and Keith, have worked hard and have improved their literacy skills since September. Their attitudes and enthusiasm have also changed. At the conclusion of this study, Matty's literacy knowledge had increased the most. He enjoyed reading and often said, "Hey, I can read now! I like to read!" He showed the most effort and the results were reflective of it. Keith continued to struggle in some areas, but has vastly built up his literacy knowledge. I was confident that with a little more effort and consistency, he would eventually catch up to his classmates. Davey had slightly increased his literacy knowledge, but still struggled in several areas. I expected him to progress more than he did. He was the oldest of all the first graders and had repeated kindergarten. I thought that with the extra time spent in kindergarten and these implemented strategies and modifications, that Davey had an edge on his fellow strugglers. I was curious as to why he continued to struggle.

Davey is currently going through the IST process. The Instructional Support Team has come up with different strategies and modifications to use in order to assist Davey in school. We are also exploring ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) as a possible explanation for Davey's lack of focus and progress this year. We are currently waiting for Davey's parents to fill out the appropriate paper work. However, they have not yet complied. Therefore, our

hands are tied on this matter so we continue to use our resources and provide Davey with the best possible education.

However, what is the *best* education? Who gets to decide that? I used to think that if I met the needs of all my students then I was giving them the best education possible. However, if Davey does have a medical condition that needs to be treated in order for him to receive optimal instruction, how can I provide him with the best education? If his parents refuse to seek medical attention, how can I effectively instruct him? I have now become the struggler, seeking ways to reach the unreachable students. Therefore I am left wondering... What other factors contribute to a child's failures and struggles in school? What other strategies and methods can an educator implement to meet the needs of struggling first graders, especially when outside factors play a roll such as, domestic or medical issues?

As a whole, I would like to increase the overall performance of my students. I am always looking for new methods of instructing my students. I like to feel confident that my students have reached their finest potential in first grade before I send them on to second grade. I will continue to read the most current literature on guided reading and literacy instruction. I will also begin to explore strategies that encourage greater cooperation and involvement among the parents of struggling students. I need their support to provide an optimal education.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix A: HSIRB Approval



MORAVIAN COLLEGE

September 17, 2004

Robin J. Lanni
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

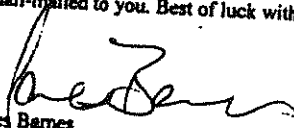
Dear Robin J. Lanni,

The Moravian College Human Subjects Internal Review Board approved your proposal: *Modifying current literacy curriculum: Exploring strategies to meet the needs of struggling first grade students*. Given the materials submitted, your proposal received an expedited review. A copy of your proposal will remain with the HSIRB Chair.

Please note the phone numbers you have on both Informed Consents for Dr. Shosh may be incorrect.

Should any other aspect of your research change or extend past one year of the date of this letter, you must file those changes or extensions with the HSIRB before implementation.

This letter will be e-mailed and snail-mailed to you. Best of luck with your research.


James Barnes
Chair, Human Subjects Internal Review Board
Moravian College
610-861-1672 (voice)
610-861-1657 (FAX)
barnesj@moravian.edu

Appendix B: Principal Consent Letter

September 13, 2004

Dear [REDACTED]

This year I will be completing my Master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction at Moravian College. My final requirement is to conduct a research study based on my own teaching practices. The title of my research study is "Modifying Current Literacy Curriculum: Exploring Strategies to Meet the Needs of Struggling First Grade Students".

During this semester, August 30 through December 17, I will be trying different methods and activities to increase the literacy skills of all the students in my class. One goal of such instruction will be to decrease frustration and increase enthusiasm during literacy instruction.

As part of my study, I will be observing the students' behaviors during the different methods of instruction. I will also interview all of my first graders to learn their feelings and attitudes about learning literacy. I will be performing on-going assessments to determine if students are improving in literacy.

All of my first graders will be involved in these new strategies as part of my literacy curriculum. They will all benefit and experience success by working with material geared at their levels. However, participation in this study is voluntary. Each child has the right to withdraw from my study at any time. The children will not be penalized in any way for not participating in or withdrawing from this study. The children's identities will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms will appear in any written report or publication of my findings.

I am asking for your support and permission to conduct this research study. If you have any questions or concerns about my research study, please let me know at your earliest convenience. You may also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Joseph Shosh at Moravian College by phone at 610-861-1842. If you feel comfortable with this information, please sign and return the bottom portion of this letter. Thank you for your help and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Miss Robin Lanni

.....
I attest that I am the building principal, that I read, understood, and received a copy of this consent form, and that I give my permission for Miss Robin Lanni to conduct her research study during the 2004-2005 school year.

Principal's signature: [REDACTED]

Date: _____

Appendix C: Parent Consent Letter

September 23, 2004

Dear Families,

This year I will be completing my Master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction at Moravian College. My final requirement is to conduct a research study based on my own teaching practices. The title of my research study is "Modifying Current Curriculum: Exploring Strategies to Meet the Needs of Struggling First Grade Students".

During this semester, August 30 through December 17, I will be trying different methods and activities to meet the needs of all the students in my class. My goal is to decrease frustration and increase enthusiasm during literacy instruction.

As part of my study, I will be observing the students' behaviors during the different methods of instruction. I will also interview the class to learn their feelings and attitudes about learning literacy. I will be performing on-going assessments to determine if students are improving in literacy.

All of my first graders will be involved in these new strategies as part of my literacy curriculum. They will all benefit and experience success by working with material geared at their academic levels. However, participation for my study is voluntary. Your child reserves the right to withdraw from my study at any time. Your children's identities will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms will appear in any written report or publication of my findings. This is NOT a study on the children, but on different teaching strategies.

If you have any questions or concerns about my research study, please contact me at school [redacted]. You may also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Joseph Shosh at Moravian College by phone at 610-861-1482. If you feel comfortable with this information, please sign and return the bottom portion of this letter. Thank you for your help and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Miss Robin Lanni

.....
I attest that I am the child's legally authorized guardian, that I read and understood this consent form, and that I received a copy.

Legal guardian's signature: _____

Child's name: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

These questions will act as a guide during the interviews. The students' answers to questions may lead the interview in a different direction.

Pre semi-structured interview questions

How do you feel about reading?

PROBES: Do you like it?

Do you dislike it?

Is it easy or hard for you?

What helps you learn reading (literacy)?

PROBES: Do you like when I teach to the whole group or do you like small groups better?

Do you like working with a partner? Can you tell me why?

What do you like to read about?

PROBE: What topics do you enjoy reading about?

Which center activities do you like best? Can you tell me why?

Is there anything I can do that you think will help you learn reading?

PROBES: What can I do to help you?

What do you think you need from me?

Appendix E: Letter Identification Assessment

A E X M Q U

G T B F J R

V N C Y O I

D L W S P Z

H K g c y o

a e x m q u

g t b f j r

v n a h k i

d l w s p z

LETTER NAMES CORRECT
 / TOTAL LETTER NAMES

Appendix F: Letter Sounds Oral Assessment

s t b h m k
 f l n d x/ks/ g/g/ /l/
 z p y v q/kw/ c/k/ /s/
 j r w

 ä ā ï ī ö ō
 ŭ ū ū/oo/ ě ē y/ī/ /ē/

21 consonants / 23 sounds

6 vowels / 13 sounds

_____ SOUNDS CORRECT
TOTAL SOUNDS

_____ VOWEL SOUNDS CORRECT
TOTAL VOWEL SOUNDS

_____ Your child was able to say all the correct consonant and vowel sounds.

_____ Please practice the letter sounds that are circled.

Appendix G: Writing the Alphabet

A 5x5 grid of empty boxes for writing the alphabet. A cartoon cat holding a pencil is positioned at the top left of the grid, and another cartoon cat holding a pencil is at the bottom right. A small circle is drawn in the top right corner of the grid.

Write the alphabet in order.

Appendix H: October DIBELS Assessment

V l h g S y Z W L N
 i K T D K T q d z w
 h w z m U r j G X u
 g R B Q I f I Z s r
 S n C B p Y F c a E
 y s Q P M v O t n P
 Z A e x f F h u A t
 W G H b S l g m i i
 L L o o X N E Y p x
 N k c D d y b j R v
 V M W q V l h g S y

sim

lut

wub	doj	ik	vus	nuk
uf	zel	feb	wuj	hiz
min	ros	kub	jaf	duz
faj	ad	ked	ig	el
loj	et	yat	ol	tov
uf	ral	ep	kab	vif
tic	dev	dop	zac	doc
tik	sij	zoj	mig	zut
foj	ib	jud	zek	vov
ruz	huf	sib	ak	jec

Appendix I: Word Lists

Name _____

Unit 2 Word Wall Words

Please practice the circled words with your child.

no

went

does

will

me

he

come

saw

into

away

walk

this

down

did

water

find

why

by

are

many

eat

play

on

sing

all

how

stop

make

they

them

Name _____ Date _____


These are the sight words we have had so far. Please practice the words I have circled.

a	can	is	little
the	my	have	do
like	at	you	in
and	I	it	not
look	see	to	that
big	for	get	was
we	up	what	am
but	go	here	where

_____ Your child recognizes all 32 sight words. GREAT!

Appendix J: Running Records

Level 3

		Reading Record			
Name: _____		Age: _____		Date: _____	
Text: <u>Wake up, Father Bear</u>		Level: <u>3</u>		R. Wt: <u>69</u>	
		Accuracy: _____		S.C. Rate: _____	
Page	This story is about the bear family and their names are Father Bear, Mother Bear, and Baby Bear.	E	S.C.	Errors MSV	Self-corrections MSV
2	Here is Baby Bear. Here is Mother Bear.				
3	Here is Father Bear.				
4	Baby Bear is up. Mother Bear is up.				
6	Father Bear is in bed.				
8	Baby Bear said, "Wake up, Father Bear."				
10	Mother Bear said, "Wake up, Father Bear."				
12	"Look at Father Bear," said Mother Bear. "Look at Father Bear," said Baby Bear.				
14	"Here I come!" said Baby Bear. "Wake up, Father Bear."				
16	"I am up," said Father Bear.				
Total					

Level 3: *Wake up, Father Bear*

Assessment Record

Name: _____

Analysis of retelling (*meaning, main ideas, coherence, vocabulary, reference to text*)

Questions to check for understanding (*check if understanding acceptable*)

1. What did Baby Bear say to Father Bear?

Response: _____

2. What did Baby Bear do to make Father Bear wake up?

Response: _____

3. Why do you think Father Bear was teasing Baby Bear and Mother Bear?

Response: _____

Reading level

Accuracy level: _____ = 1: _____ = _____ %

Self-correction rate: _____ = _____ = 1: _____

Reading level (*with understanding*): Easy / Instructional / Hard

Analysis of reading behaviors (*print concepts, meaning cues, structural cues, visual information, self-monitoring, self-correcting, fluency, expression*)

Recommendations: _____

Teacher: _____

Date benchmark assessment completed: _____



Level 7

Reading Record

Name: _____ Age: _____ Date: _____
 Text: Little Rabbit's party Level: 7 R. Wt: 98
 Accuracy: _____ S.C. Rate: _____

Page	This story is about a birthday party, and the characters in it are Little Duck, Little Kitten, and Little Rabbit.	E	S.C.	Errors MSV	Self-corrections MSV
2	Little Duck went for a walk. "I will go and see Little Kitten today," she said.				
4	Little Duck said to Little Kitten, "Will you come and play with me?"				
6	Little Kitten said, "I can not play with you. I'm going to a party. It is Little Rabbit's birthday today."				
8	"Oh," said Little Duck. "I'm not going to the party. I will go back home."				
10	Little Kitten went to the party, and Little Duck went home.				
12	On the way home, Little Duck said, "I can see Little Rabbit."				
14	Little Rabbit said, "Little Duck! Little Duck! I'm looking for you."				
Total					



Level 7: *Little Rabbit's party*

Assessment Record

Name: _____

Analysis of retelling (*meaning, main ideas, coherence, vocabulary, reference to text*)

Questions to check for understanding (*check if understanding acceptable*)

1. Why didn't Little Kitten play with Little Duck?

Response: _____

2. Who did Little Duck see outside her home?

Response: _____

3. How do you think Little Duck felt when she saw Little Rabbit outside her home?

Response: _____

Reading level

Accuracy level: _____ = 1: _____ = _____ %

Self-correction rate: _____ = _____ = 1: _____

Reading level (*with understanding*): Easy / Instructional / Hard

Analysis of reading behaviors (*print concepts, meaning cues, structural cues, visual information, self-monitoring, self-correcting, fluency, expression*)

Recommendations: _____

Teacher: _____

Date benchmark assessment completed: _____

Appendix K: Blending Test

Name _____ Date _____

Blending Test

Listen and tell me the whole word I say. I will separate all the sounds in a word. (Teacher says each sound slowly. Student does not see the words).

/b/ /a/ /t/

/c/ /u/ /p/

/w/ /i/ /n/

/h/ /e/ /n/

/f/ /o/ /x/

/y/ /a/ /k/

/r/ /u/ /g/

/z/ /l/ /p/

/v/ /e/ /t/

/d/ /o/ /g/

/l/ /a/ /s/ /t/

/j/ /e/ /m/





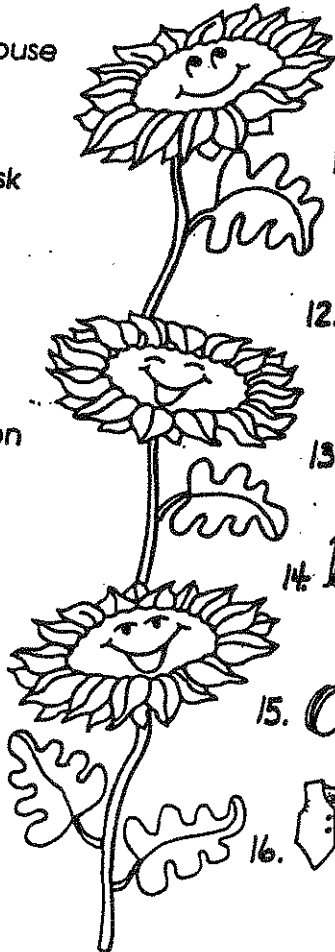













/qu/ /t/ /t/

— Your child can blend the sounds that I say out loud. Your child can say the whole word.

Appendix L: Letter Sounds Written Test

Name the pictures.

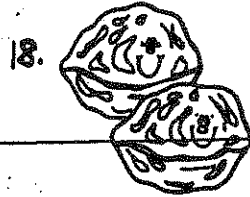
 Write each beginning letter.

1.  _____ ig		9.  _____ ish
2.  _____ ouse		10.  _____ ap
3.  _____ esk		11.  _____ amp
4.  _____ ar		12.  _____ est
5.  _____ agon		13.  _____ and
6.  _____ ite		14.  _____ ate
7.  _____ ell		15.  _____ o-yo
8.  _____ ope		16.  _____ est

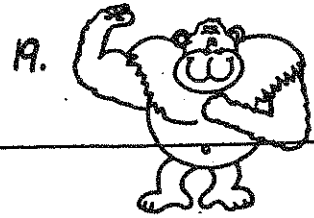
: abcdefghi jklmnopqrstuvwxyz



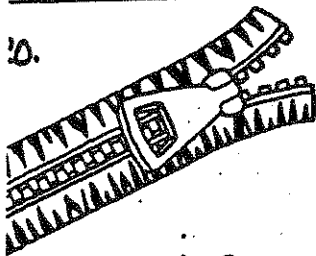
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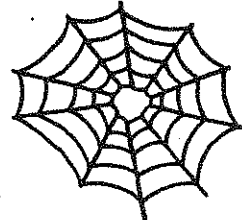
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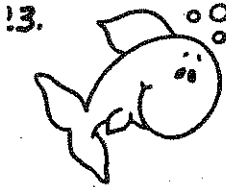
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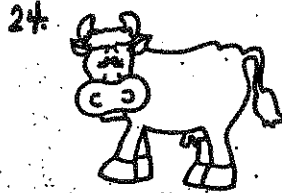
___ouse



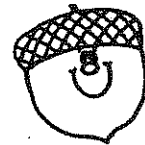
___eb



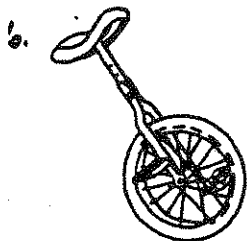
___ish



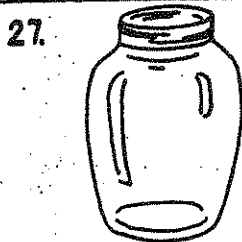
___ow



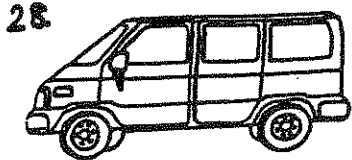
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___nicycle



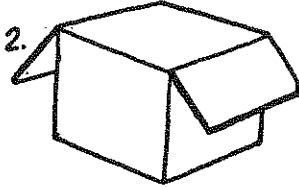
___ar



___an



lea _



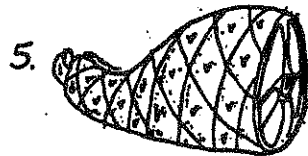
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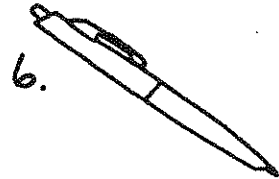
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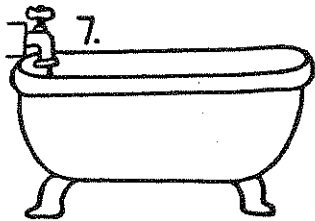
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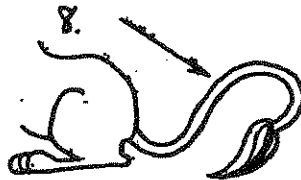
ha _



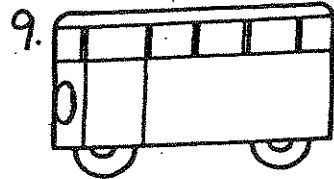
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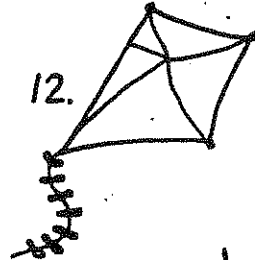
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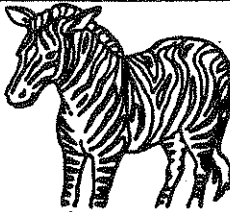


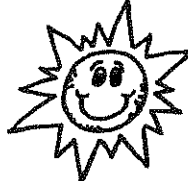


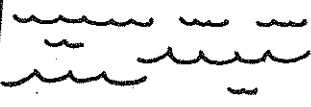
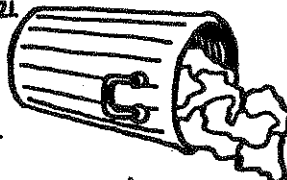

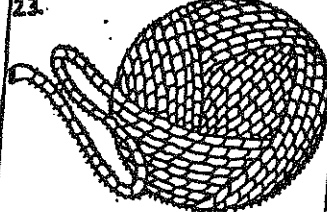
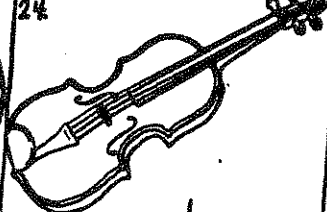


_ - ray



_ ite

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z


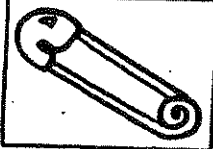




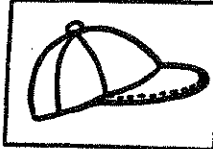
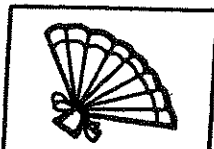



<p>13.</p>  <p>_ike</p>	<p>14.</p>  <p>_ebra</p>	<p>15.</p>  <p>_ail</p>
<p>16.</p>  <p>_uarter</p>	<p>17.</p>  <p>_un</p>	<p>18.</p>  <p>_ouse</p>
<p>19.</p>  <p>_og</p>	<p>20.</p>  <p>_ater</p>	<p>21.</p>  <p>_arbage</p>
<p>22.</p>  <p>_abbit</p>	<p>23.</p>  <p>_arn.</p>	<p>24.</p>  <p>_iolin</p>

Name _____

Skill: Review of short vowels
a, i

Print the missing vowel.



 m _ n	 p _ n	 s _ x
 m _ tt	 w _ g	 b _ t
 c _ p	 f _ n	 k _ ng
 l _ d	 h _ nd	 h _ ll

Appendix M: November DIBELS Assessment

foj	hon	tum	len	aj
suv	kam	res	kic	fav
id	wod	nej	sok	wif
bis	wem	av	jaj	ac
luj	wan	uc	bas	id
bef	zij	ven	wil	vep
lod	os	hic	vos	sov
ril	ves	jos	sej	jeb
pac	ec	dok	vut	feg
vib	kov	huv	seb	jit

Spring is Coming

It has been so cold this winter. The wind blew and blew. It rained and rained. The days have been gray and dark. I had to wear mittens and a hat to school every day. It even snowed twice.

At first winter was fun. Now I'm tired of the cold. It has been too cold and wet to play outside. At school, we sit in the library and read during recess. After school I just stay in the house and play. I don't want to play inside anymore.

But today was nice. The sun was shining brightly even though it was still cold. The wind didn't blow. My friends and I played kick ball at recess. We had to take off our jackets because we were warm. We even got hot and thirsty.

On the way home from school I saw a purple flower on our street. It was blooming in the grass. I told my mother about it. She wanted me to show it to her. She bent down and touched it.

"Come sniff this," she said. It smelled like perfume and sun all mixed together. "Spring must be right around the corner," she said. "This is a crocus. It's one of the first flowers of spring."

I can't wait for spring.

Ice Cream

When it is too hot outside, cold ice cream cools me off. I like strawberry the best, but rocky road is good, too. My brother likes bubble gum and vanilla.

The ice cream man comes down our street in the summer. When he gets close he rings his bell. All the kids hear the bell. They get some money and go outside and wait. They sit on the sidewalk until he comes. All of the kids want to buy some cold ice cream to eat.

The ice cream man has drumsticks, ice cream bars and bonbons. His ice cream tastes good. I like bonbons best.

My mother makes the very best ice cream of all. She uses our old ice cream freezer. She puts milk, sugar and eggs inside. She puts lots of ice inside, too.

I get to turn the handle. My hand gets cold and it takes a long time. My arm gets very tired turning the handle. Finally the ice cream is ready to eat. My mom lets me lick the ice cream paddle. I think the very first taste is the best.

Yum! That tastes great!

Having a Check-Up

I don't mind going to my doctor's office. There are lots of things to do while we wait. My doctor has puzzles I like to put together. There is a big fish tank in the waiting room. It has yellow and black angel fish and a pretty blue fish. When I stare at the fish they stare back at me.

Every door has an animal painted on it. Inside there are chairs that look like zebras, tigers, or lions. Even the nurse wears a jacket with animals on it. They must like animals.

Then I have my check-up. First I stand on the scale. Then the nurse measures me. She looks in my ears. Then she asks questions about how I feel. My mother helps me with the answers if I'm not sure.

My doctor has taken care of me since I was a baby. She comes in when the nurse is done. She asks more questions. She says I look very healthy and won't need to come back until next year.

I like having a checkup when I'm not sick. I didn't even have to have a shot. And the nurse gave me some cool animal stickers.