St. John Fisher University

Fisher Digital Publications

Education Masters | Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education

8-2010

Methods That Benefit Emergent Readers in Learning and Applying Sight Vocabulary in Context

Megan McElheran
St. John Fisher University

Follow this and additional works at: https://fisherpub.sjf.edu/education_ETD_masters

 Part of the Education Commons

How has open access to Fisher Digital Publications benefited you?

Recommended Citation

McElheran, Megan, "Methods That Benefit Emergent Readers in Learning and Applying Sight Vocabulary in Context" (2010). *Education Masters*. Paper 43.

Please note that the Recommended Citation provides general citation information and may not be appropriate for your discipline. To receive help in creating a citation based on your discipline, please visit http://libguides.sjfc.edu/citations.

This document is posted at https://fisherpub.sjf.edu/education_ETD_masters/43 and is brought to you for free and open access by Fisher Digital Publications at . For more information, please contact fisherpub@sjf.edu.

Methods That Benefit Emergent Readers in Learning and Applying Sight Vocabulary in Context

Abstract

Learning sight vocabulary is fundamental for all emergent readers as they are entering kindergarten and first grade. The question is what is the best way to go about teaching these words? This action research project looks at different methods of learning and applying sight words in context. The study's methodology focused on observing two students using two strategies from the literature reviewed, the copy, cover, compare, and incremental rehearsal strategies, to determine application of newly taught words. The findings suggest that there were three reoccurring themes that were interrelated and interconnected: self-correcting, applying words in context, and self-reflection. This study provides teachers with insights as to what strategies might work best for their particular students.

Document Type

Thesis

Degree Name

MS in Literacy Education

Department

Education

First Supervisor

Martha Murray

Subject Categories

Education

This thesis is available at Fisher Digital Publications: https://fisherpub.sjf.edu/education_ETD_masters/43

Methods That Benefit Emergent Readers in Learning and Applying Sight Vocabulary in Context

By

Megan McElheran

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

M.S. Literacy Education

Supervised by

Martha Murray

School of Arts and Sciences

St. John Fisher College

August 2010

Abstract

Learning sight vocabulary is fundamental for all emergent readers as they are entering kindergarten and first grade. The question is what is the best way to go about teaching these words? This action research project looks at different methods of learning and applying sight words in context. The study's methodology focused on observing two students using two strategies from the literature reviewed, the copy, cover, compare, and incremental rehearsal strategies, to determine application of newly taught words. The findings suggest that there were three reoccurring themes that were interrelated and interconnected: self-correcting, applying words in context, and self-reflection. This study provides teachers with insights as to what strategies might work best for their particular students.

Methods That Benefit Emergent Readers in Learning and Applying Sight Vocabulary in Context

Sight words are a group of words which are used frequently in texts that readers must know automatically in order to develop into efficient and fluent readers. Typically these words are explicitly taught in kindergarten and first grade and reviewed in second. A variety of activities are used, which often include a reading and writing component. Snow (1998) suggests beginning readers need direct instruction and frequent practice that leads to an understanding that spoken words are made up of smaller units of sound. They also need to become familiar with spelling-sound correspondence as well as common spelling conventions and their use in identifying printed words. The National Reading Panel (2000) identifies the development of 'sight word reading competencies' as a critical component in developing early reading foundational skills. They explain that reading sight words is necessary for young children's independence and development of more mature reading experiences as they grow older and progress in the public school curriculum. As children become more independent learners, their confidence as a reader increases as well as their willingness to take risks while attempting new texts. When children believe in themselves as readers, it empowers them to want to acquire more new knowledge.

Emergent readers usually learn to read by sounding out words, segmenting letters and sounds, and then learn to recognize whole words by blending those letters and sounds together. But how can we teach struggling children the difference between words that are phonetically consistent and words that need to be learned with automaticity? These children often become confused, discouraged, and frustrated.

Students who have difficulty learning and then transferring basic sight vocabulary into their reading are often challenged for them to move beyond the emergent level. For this critical action research project, I investigated the benefits of using different methods for teaching sight or high frequency vocabulary words to emergent learners.

Theoretical Framework

Larson & Marsh wrote, "Literacy is not a discrete set of skills, but taught within contexts, which are shaped by social interaction amongst groups of people" (11). Larson & Marsh (2005) describe literacy as socially-based. Teachers engage students in literacy learning by providing students with multiple opportunities to read, write, listen, and speak with one another. Student conversation fosters literacy development, whether children are inside the classroom, outside playing at recess, socializing during lunch, or outside of the school environment; students' literacy learning is interconnected and interrelated. Children learn and act based on their own understanding of what is going on in and around the world in which they live (Dyson, 2008). According to Dyson (2008), it is important to bridge children's learning in the classroom with their learning outside the classroom. This helps us to know and understand the culture of the lives of the students in the classroom because students learn and acquire things differently.

Oral language development is vital in the process of children's learning and thinking development and it provides a framework for the development of other language skills. Research indicates that in order for children to understand what language is, it needs to come from social interactions (Chomsky, 1965; Halliday, 1969; Gee, 2001). Gee (2001) suggests that acquisition usually occurs in the primary discourse, home/family/culture, and secondary discourse is primarily where we learn, school/work place. He goes on to say "the secondary

discourse all build on, and extend, the uses of language we acquired as part of our primary discourse, and they are more or less compatible with the primary discourses of different social groups." (541). Halliday (1969) suggests "a child's interaction with others, which begins at birth, is gradually given form by language, through the process whereby at a very early age language already begins to mediate in every aspect of his experience" (30). Halliday (1969), like Chomsky (1965), found that kids have a predisposition to learn their language. It is essential for children's word recognition skills, their sight vocabulary, to be developed through a variety of contexts where knowledge and understanding of how these words work are reinforced.

The research of Gee (2001), Halliday (1969), and Chomsky (1965) indicates that in order for children to understand what language is, it needs to come from social interactions. Social interactions occur both at school and at home. Gee (2001) and Larson & Marsh (2005) suggest that social practice is a critical part of how students acquire language. Larson & Marsh (2005) say that literacy is acquired through social practice that imbeds the autonomous model, can be taught in similar ways across varying context, and the ideological models, literacy is shaped by social, cultural, economic, and political context, of literacy (11). This might suggest giving students opportunities for peer interactions within the classroom environment may help to increase students' development of their word recognition skills. Teachers should provide time for students' to practice reading and writing sight words throughout the school day in multiple contexts.

Through modeling using components of the balanced literacy framework such as, interactive writing, read alouds, and shared reading, word recognition skills are repeated and reinforced. Pearson & Stephens (1984) write that "literacy is something that is woven into everything we do" (40). They suggest that "we need to make careful and informed decisions about the role

literacy will play in our lives and about the role we want literacy to have in the lives of our students" (40). Students need to be engaged in authentic and meaningful activities that will reinforce knowledge and use of sight words/high-frequency words not only in isolation but through a variety of contexts.

Many early literacy experiences focus on the use of basic sight vocabulary or high-frequency words that a student will encounter throughout his/her early years of learning. "Children learn certain customs, beliefs, and skills in early enculturation experiences with written materials; the bedtime story is a major literacy event which helps set patterns of behavior that recur repeatedly through the life of mainstream children and adults" (Heath, 1982, 75).

Research Question

Based on the theoretical framework that literacy and language acquisition go hand in hand and that learning occurs through social interaction embedded with authentic and meaningful activities, this action research project asks, what method of teaching sight vocabulary benefits emergent readers in learning and applying in context sight vocabulary?

Literature Review

"Reading is an essential component of education which has been linked to an individuals' overall achievement and success over their lifetime. With more than half of all school-aged children in the United States reading below grade level, a national emergency has been declared to promote reading skills" (Huang, Nelson, and Nelson, 2008, 33). Furthermore, educators report that children who do not learn to read fluently by first grade are at risk of falling further behind their peers each year (Norman & Wood, 2008). "Students who have reading difficulties as early as kindergarten and first grade require explicit instruction to develop fluent decoding and

word identification skills" (Norman & Wood, 2008, 96). Flint, Coyne, Stiller, and Heath (2008) state, "to characterize fully the progress that young children make towards improved sight word reading, a closer examination of children's self-reported reading strategies is required" (643).

Stuart, Masterson, and Dixon, (2000) writes "psychological theories of reading development agree that an important aspect of learning to read involves setting up word recognition procedures that enable children to access the meanings and pronunciations of printed words; and that these procedures must be able to deal with both familiar and unfamiliar printed words. That is, children must develop a sight vocabulary of known words which can be instantly recognized and understood" (12). From the National Reading Panel (2000), "researchers have demonstrated that students who are at risk for reading difficulties require instruction that directly targets the acquisition of fluent word recognition skills" (96). The purpose of this review is to determine what strategies (methods) are needed to teach sight word vocabulary to emergent learners.

Repeated Reading of Sight Words in Isolation

Stuart et al., (2000) state, "theories of reading development agree that an important aspect of learning to read involves setting up word recognition procedures that enables children to access the meanings and pronunciations of printed words" (12). Research further supports that "children must develop a sight vocabulary of known words which can be instantly recognized and understood."(Stuart et al., 2000, 12). Studies by Stuart et al., (2000) and Nist & Joseph (2008) support that an effective strategy to increase sight word vocabulary is teaching words in isolation through repeated exposure. Stuart et al., (2000) researched the effectiveness of teaching sight words through repeated presentation of single words on flashcards that were taught alone out of context. The researchers "tested the claim that children would learn new sight vocabulary

through repeated exposure to words in texts, and found that sight vocabulary is most effectively taught explicitly, out of context, through flashcards, rather than through reading the words in books or through a mixed strategy of reading words in books together with the prior presentation of key words on flashcards" (472). Conley, Derby, Roberts-Gwinn, Weber, & McLaughlin (2004) say that "emergent readers who rely on context and picture cues have been shown not to attend sufficiently to the written text, thus, even though emergent readers are often instructed to look at pictures to determine unknown words, the research suggests that pictures act as distracters in reading performance" (340). The results of this study proved that using flashcards to teach children new vocabulary leads to more successful acquisition of the vocabulary (Stuart et al., 2000) and suggests that emergent readers need repetition in order to acquire new sight word vocabulary. They need several opportunities to be exposed to these new words in order to place that word into his/her vocabulary and thus into their memory (Stuart et al., 2000). Norman & Wood (2008) further say "struggling readers often need frequent, systematic and repeated practice to master difficult or new learned sight word skills" (98).

Nist & Joseph's (2008) research was similar to that of Stuart et al., (2000), in that both found teaching sight words in isolation through the use of flashcards was most effective for emergent readers when learning new words. Although Nist & Joseph (2008) claimed using flashcards were effective for sight word recognition, they also discovered the effectiveness and efficiency of inserting unknown sight words along with known sight words at varying increments this is known as the "incremental rehearsal" condition. Nist & Joseph (2008) state, "for children to learn to read words automatically or effortlessly, words may first need to be taught and practiced in isolation, which is probably best achieved through increased amounts of drill and practice with words" (295). This means that in order for students to have that automaticity with words they

need to have several encounters with the word alone before they will have that word secured in their sight word memory bank, as Stuart et al., (2000) discovered in their findings. From these findings, the data showed students read more accurately when words were taught under the incremental rehearsal condition than just showing them the sight words using a basic flashcard drill procedure. The existing data proposed that giving opportunities to practice skills as part of academic instructional procedures resulted in skills that were maintained over time (Nist & Joseph, 2008). Nist & Joseph (2008) also say that "incremental rehearsal may be the method of choice for those students who need to build upon foundational knowledge, who continue to have difficulty retaining skills over time, or who need to experience frequent success so they remain actively engaged in reading words" (305). Nist & Joseph's (2008) research suggests that in order for students to learn new words, particularly struggling readers, they need to have a mixture of known and simple words along with unknown and challenging words to allow them to feel more successful in their achievements. Students need to feel successful in order to develop the confidence to continue to "grow" their repertoire of sight words. Mesmer, Duhon, Hogan, Newry, Hommema, Fletcher, and Boso (2010) imply that students who have difficulty learning how to read often have trouble applying the skills they've developed across contexts, and thus they may struggle when asked to read less familiar material. Again this reinforces the findings that were reported from the study done by Stuart et al., (2000) which supports repeated readings of sight words in isolation. Explicit strategies need to occur to help promote reading skills so that children are able to transfer learned words into context to help improve oral reading fluency and comprehension (Mesmer et al., 2010).

Another study by Mesmer et al., (2010) builds upon the thoughts and ideas of both Stuart et al., (2000) and Nist & Joseph (2008) suggesting that sight words should be taught in isolation as

opposed to learning them in context. Mesmer et al., (2010) examined the impact of using a common stimulus procedure on accurate reading of unknown words that were orthographically similar to a set of known words. This is similar to the Berends and Reitsma (2006) study which attempted to incorporate common stimulus conditions that saliently highlighted critical word structures during intervention. In both studies, researchers wanted to discover the effectiveness of a color coded system on vocabulary acquisition. The purpose of the study was to teach unknown sight words using flashcards and compare the effects between presenting word families using a color coding system versus using black ink. They wanted to discover not only if teaching new words in isolation was effective, but if adding a color to similar word parts (i.e., rime) would have a positive effect on acquisition.

The results showed that minimal to no gains were made in acquiring the introduced words when they were presented on the black inked flashcards. However, the color coding system "resulted in increased stimulus control such that reading words was performed at a higher level when the "cue" was present" (Mesmer et al., 2010, 58). Most of the participants were able to read the taught words with more accuracy within the first few days of the intervention. Thus, when using a stimulus such as the color-cue system, students were better able to read with increasing accuracy making this an effective strategy for classroom use (Mesmer et al., 2010).

As Stuart et al., (2000) researched the effectiveness of teaching sight words through repeated presentation of single words on flashcards, Marvin et al., (2010) did a similar study that dealt with multiple showings of unknown words through a procedure known as "response repetition." The response repetition was used as an error-correction for sight word reading (Marvin et al., 2010). The findings were similar to those of Stuart et al., (2000) and Nist & Joseph (2008), which suggests the more exposure a child has to an unknown word the more likely he/she will be

able to acquire it and transfer within context. In the study, the researchers "evaluated the effects of response repetition, also known as RR, as an error-correction procedure for increasing sight-word reading using a multiple baseline design" (Marvin et al., 2010, 109). The results showed an increase in sight word recognition for all participants in this study. Marvin et al., (2010) states "by emitting the correct response in the presence of a written sight word, participants avoided the additional stimulation imposed by the RR procedure for an incorrect response" (121). The researchers go on to say "it is possible that repeated practice of the correct response increased correct responding" (Marvin et al., 2010, 121). In addition to increasing correct responding through repeated practice, verbal praise used as positive reinforcement had an increased effect on response acquisition of learning new words.

Conley et al., (2004), also worked toward proving that sight words are better learned and correctly identified when they are taught in isolation. The researchers claim that "the purpose of reading instruction is to ensure that the student is able to correctly identify the words of a text and then be able to extract meaning. By focusing on word-level cues, the reader can identify words without being distracted by other stimuli, such as pictures, being presented within reading context" (Conley et al., 2004, 339). Therefore, they created a study that compared two methods: sight words being matched with pictures and sight words presented in isolation using the "copy, cover, compare" method (Conley et al., 2004). The results of this study showed that "word acquisition with words in isolation failed to occur when the picture-matching task was used for initial word acquisition" (Conley et al., 2004, 343). The researchers found that "after using the copy, cover, compare method, acquisition of new sight words in isolation was mastered at 100% as well as maintenance was obtained" (Conley et al., 2004, 343). "Even though the copy, cover, compare method required more training sessions, our results suggest that it is a superior

procedure for teaching word recognition skills" (Conley at el., 2004, 347). Again this method supports what Stuart et al., (2000), Nist & Joseph (2008), and Marvin et al., (2010) proved that repeated exposure of a word taught in isolation is an effective strategy in teaching sight word vocabulary to emergent readers.

Technology

"Technology programs are being viewed as resources for addressing the literacy needs of young readers," (Englert, Zhao, Collings, and Romig, 2005, 357). "Several computer programs have been designed and implemented with young readers to ameliorate or prevent literacy difficulties. *Writing to Read*, for example, was designed to improve the reading and writing performance of young students in kindergarten and first grade" (Englert et al., 2005, 358). Torgesen, Waters, Cohen, and Torgesen (1988) created and examined a software program intended to improve the word recognition skills of students with learning disabilities (LD). In the study completed by Torgesen et al., (1988), they reported that "third and fourth grade students with LD added sight vocabulary at the rate of one word for every 6.7 minutes of study with the software program" (358). Olson, Foltz, and Wise (1986) and Roth and Beck (1987) detected similar reading improvements resulted from computer-based word identification programs. The findings of this study concluded computers can be used to effectively develop word recognition skills by offering a number of repetitions of specific words within a short period of time (Olson et al., 1986). The research articles reviewed showed the impact that technology has on struggling readers and how different programs are being used to help promote literacy development amongst children. Englert et al., (2005) states, "technology programs might be especially suited to offer technical support in the development of word recognition by providing a large amount of extended practice" (358).

Englert et al., (2005), explored the effects of Internet-based software on the improvement of reading performance. They looked specifically at how Internet-based reading software can increase the acquisition of sight word vocabulary in struggling students. In this study, researchers used the TELE-Web software program. TELE-Web software is a program that provides teachers and students with tools to aid in the development of literacy skills (i.e., reading, writing). In this particular study, the TELE-Web software used cloze activities to support reading performance that centered on high-frequency words (Englert et al., 2005). Students "target" words were inserted into this program. Englert et al., (2005) say that "many of the studies of computer-assisted word recognition training have not required students to read target words in the context of sentences or passages, yet the provision of extended practice in reading and identifying words in context can enable students to strategically employ syntactic information to assist word recognition" (361).

Overall, the TELE-Web program resulted in an increase in the accuracy and acquisition of reading sight words introduced. The TELE-Web seemed to offer an advantage over the prior reading practice, as the reading gain for the participants using this program was more noticeable. In addition, it enhanced reading performances for those students who were having reading difficulties (Englert et al., 2005). Using technology, such as a computer-based program, to help teach sight words proved to be an effective method for young children. Not only is technology an effective tool, but reading and learning these words in context within the program demonstrated to be successful as well.

Mechling, Gast, and Krupa's (2007) study was similar to that of Englert et al., (2005), in that both investigated the effects that technology had on increasing reading performance. However, Mechling et al., (2007) examined the use of a SMART Board on vocabulary acquisition, whereas

Englert et al., (2005) studied the effectiveness of using computer-based programs. This study measured whether displaying information on a large screen, as the SMART Board, was an interactive way to teach and learn new sight words within a small-group setting (Mechling et al., 2007). The results were positive and supported the use of SMART Board technology in a small group setting. Participants were able to acquire new vocabulary taught to them through the use of interaction with the SMART Board (Mechling et al., 2007). They concluded "future research should examine the effects of this strategy in comparison to more traditional set-ups such as the use of flashcards for teaching sight word reading" (Mechling et al., 2007, 1881). Mechling et al., (2007) suggests that in this particular setting, the use of the SMART Board as a means to teach specific vocabulary was effective, but studies should be done to compare it to more traditional ways of acquiring sight word vocabulary to determine how effective each method is for struggling readers.

Twenty-first Century learning supports the use of multi-medias as a way to support student learning. "Children of today who live in a highly technological era may be exposed to books not only through an adult's reading, but also by independently activating electronic storybooks (e-books) which are available on the internet or on CD-ROMs" (Korat, 2010, 24). The work of Korat (2010) supported the use of technology to help children acquire sight vocabulary similar to the works of Englert et al., (2008) and Mechling et al., (2007). However, Korat (2010) and Mechling (2007) supports the use of technology through the use of electronic books, but differing from Englert et al., (2010) whose technology was through the use of SMART Boards.

Korat (2010) studied the effects of reading an electronic or e-book on children's language and literacy. "E-books can often times include multimedia effects such as oral reading, written text, oral discourse, music sound effects, and animation" (Korat, 2010, 24). E-books can offer

students opportunities for word reading and word recognition. Overall, students who participated using the e-books were better at recalling sight words than those who did not use the e-book to learn the vocabulary (Korat, 2010). In contrast to previous researchers (Stuart et al., (2000), Nist & Joseph (2008), and Mesner et al., (2010)), Korat (2010) claims that this type of experience is more powerful in learning sight vocabulary when the reading activity is an authentic experience compared to the more traditional drill approach. This study proved that young readers benefit from online software to help them increase their reading performances which includes word recognition skills.

Tutoring/Social Interaction

Huang, Nelson, and Nelson (2008) states that "many reading tutoring programs exist in the elementary school setting; what is most commonly missing is a consistent method that tutors can follow, whether the tutors are a parent, older student, college student, peer, or adult volunteer" (33). Huang et al.'s, (2008) research examines the effects of repeated readings through multiple sessions within a collaborative partnership between participant and tutor. In the tutoring sessions students practiced the repeated reading intervention similar to that of Stuart et al., (2000) and Nist & Joseph (2008). Students had several exposures to different texts at their level. The tutor would read a passage from a text and the participant would repeat the passage or page after, marking word errors made and going over them. This process continues until the book was finished.

Over the 10-week period the increase in sight word recognition was considerable. Before the intervention was implemented, students combined sight word recognition was 114 words. After the intervention, students combined sight word recognition was 260 words (Huang et al., 2008).

"The increase in sight vocabulary may allow the reader greater access to a larger general lexicon, facilitating comprehension" (Huang et al., 2008, 37). This implies that as a child's sight word vocabulary increases, so is their ability to read and comprehend more difficult books, suggesting word recognition goes hand in hand with oral reading fluency and comprehension. The experiment designed in this study could be easily adapted for peers or adult volunteers within the classroom. "The student-directed repeated reading and feedback intervention was successful in demonstrating positive results" (Huang et al., 2008, 38). Researchers in this study wanted to create a strategy for struggling readers that emphasized improving oral reading fluency through repetition and tutoring (Huang et al., 2008). Students learn from interaction with others, so this study suggests using peers as a means to support struggling readers in the development of word recognition skills.

From the National Reading Panel (2000), "researchers have demonstrated that students who are at risk for reading difficulties require instruction that directly targets the acquisition of fluent word recognition skills." The study conducted by Norman & Wood (2008) involved students who had reading difficulties. Each participant was taught to tutor one another and provide feedback with the use of a prerecorded sight word model. "Peer tutoring (PT) is an evidence-based, cooperative learning strategy that increases students' engagement with academic content and when PT systems support students as both tutor and tutee, as in reciprocal PT models, more than 100 active responses immediately followed by feedback can be accomplished within a 20-minute session" (Norman & Wood, 2008, 96). Students were shown how to do the reciprocal peer tutoring and were working with each other on unknown sight words. As a result, accurate word identification showed a significant increase. This study claims that peer-tutoring has great

benefits for struggling readers, as suggested in the study by Huang et al., (2008). Both researchers' findings support working with other people provided positive and sizeable results.

Context

This study took place in a suburban elementary school in Western New York. As of the 2008-2009 school year there were 29 classroom teachers with 11 resource teachers in the building. There are 468 students enrolled and attending school with an average of 15 students per classroom. 69% of the schools' population is Caucasian, 18% are African American, 10% are Asian, 2% are Hispanic or Latino, and 1% are American Indian or Alaska Native. Twenty-four percent of students are eligible for free lunch and 6% are eligible for reduced-priced lunch.

Participants

I worked with two first grade students for this research project. Brian was a 7 years and 4 months old Caucasian male. He is an outgoing and energetic young boy. He loves horses, playing outside, and using the computer. Brian was new to school, coming in late February from another rural school district in Western New York. His reading level from the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) testing as of May was a level D-4. I have worked with Brian since February in a small group setting as well as in a 1:1 setting. Brian continues to struggle with 1:1 matching, decoding strategies, and sight word recognition. Brian works hard, but often gets distracted and frustrated when he can't decode words while reading. Brian benefits from positive reinforcement, repetition, and practice of newly introduced skills and strategies.

My second student Sara was a 7 years and 1 month old Caucasian female. She enjoys working with others and is eager to become a more independent reader. Sara's reading level from the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) testing as of May was a level E. I have

worked with her all year in a small group setting as well as in a 1:1 setting, but she has only moved up one level since September. Sara continues to struggle with decoding strategies and sight word recognition. Sara is a hard working student who loves coming to school and learning.

Researcher Stance

As a researcher, I worked one on one with both Brian and Sara. Currently I am a graduate student at St. John Fisher College as well as a first grade teacher. I am working on obtaining my Masters Degree in Childhood Literacy and presently have a Bachelor's degree in Childhood Education (1-6) with a specialization in Mathematics as well as a Middle School Extension in Mathematics (6-8). At this time, I am finishing my fourth year as a $1^{st}/2^{nd}$ grade looping teacher and will continue to teach 2^{nd} grade as I head into the fall. My ultimate goal is to become a Literacy Specialist (K-2).

I chose to research sight word vocabulary because I have had students in my classroom who have struggled with sight word recognition thus making it extremely difficult for them to move from emergent to more independent, strategic readers. In order to move these children forward, it is important for them to have a collection of words that they recognize automatically in context. I wanted to investigate different methods/strategies that might help promote sight word recognition.

Method

For this action research project, I implemented two sight vocabulary strategies with Brian and Sara and determined the benefits and shortcomings of each strategy. The study focused on sight vocabulary strategies that are taught in isolation. While implementing these strategies, I observed Brian and Sara's interactions with the new sight vocabulary. I observed each child's

body language, gestures, movements, and their ability to apply these words into context. I looked at how the different strategies worked and what benefits I saw from using each of them.

Brian and Sara worked with me for seven sessions each lasting for about 30 minutes and two different strategies were used during each session. Brian and Sara learned new sight vocabulary words using the incremental rehearsal strategy and the copy, cover, compare strategy.

For the incremental rehearsal strategy, I showed Brian and Sara one new sight vocabulary word followed by two known sight words (sight words they already have secured in their sight word memory "bank"). Then I showed the new word from before again followed by three known sight words. This process continued until the new sight word was presented increasingly in that style numerous times. I introduced two new sight vocabulary words a session using this strategy.

The copy, cover, compare strategy was also used in isolation, but it added a writing component. In this strategy, Brian and Sara were shown a new sight vocabulary word. Each child copied the new sight word, tracing over dotted lines. Then the word was covered up, and the student tried to write the word from memory and compared it after he/she wrote it. Brian and Sara were given two new sight words a session.

At the conclusion of each session, both children were given a text at their instructional level that incorporated the new sight words introduced to them that day. Brian and Sara were asked to go on a "word hunt" to find any of the newly taught words in the book. Afterward, both participants were asked to read the text to determine if they transferred the words from isolation into context.

By our sixth session, both Brian and Sara were introduced to 12 new sight words. During our final session, I gave both students a survey which asked them about each strategy and the new words learned. I asked them questions such as; which strategy they liked best and why, which strategy they thought helped them learn the new sight words more easily and why, and which strategy they would like to continue to use in 2nd grade. I also administered a post-assessment to determine if any new words were retained.

Quality and Credibility of Research

Credibility

Credibility is defined as "the researcher's ability to take into account the complexities that present themselves in a study and to deal with patterns that are not easily explained" (Mills, 2007, 104). To ensure credibility throughout this research process I continually observed both Brian and Sara, looking at all encompassing behaviors that each participant exhibited during our sessions together. I practiced triangulation by looking at an assortment of data sources and different methods with one another and cross-checked the data (Mills, 2007). I participated in peer debriefing with my critical colleague who has helped me to reflect on this project (Mills, 2007). Finally, I collected artifacts from Brian and Sara that showed their progress over time. My collection consisted of written observations, pre/post assessments, surveys, and conversations we had with one another.

Transferability

Transferability refers to "a researchers' belief that everything they study is context bound and not to create statements that can be generalized to larger groups of people" (Mills, 2007, 104). In this study I collected detailed and descriptive data that relates to my research topic. Developing

detailed descriptions of the context is important so that feelings and thoughts can be made with other contexts (Mills, 2007).

Dependability

Dependability refers to ensuring the data I collected is stable and secure enough that if someone else was to research the same topic, they would know how to and discover similar findings (Mills. 2007). The "overlap" method, which is similar to the triangulation process, is one way to ensure dependability was be used in this project. I used two different methods/strategies to ensure the weakness of one is balanced by the strength of the other (Mills, 2007). Another way dependability was utilized in this study was by creating an "audit trail", which means I will be sending my data collection, analysis, and interpretation to my critical colleague who will examine my work and send back any feedback or suggestions (Mills, 2007).

Conformability

Conformability is defined as "the neutrality or objectivity of the data that has been collected" (Mills, 2007, 105). I practiced reflexivity by keeping a journal on a regular basis to document my thoughts and observations. This journal helped aid in my research question and continually had me think about the work that I was doing in the classroom. In addition, the triangulation process will be used to ensure conformability is utilized. Since two different methods were used in this study, it allowed me to compare and cross-check the data.

Informed Consent and Protecting the Right of the Participant

I collected informed consent to protect the rights of the participant before I began my research project. I wrote letters to the parents of each child explaining the research study, the location, length of time, risks, benefits, and confidentiality. I asked for a signature to ensure parents understood their rights as the parent/guardian of a research participant. In addition, I gave a consent form to both Brian and Sara that discussed the study and their role in my research project. I asked for their permission and signature to ensure they understood their rights as the research participants.

Data Collection

For this study I used active observation and field notes, and wrote about my observations. I looked at hand gestures, eye movements, body language and movements, facial expressions, subvocalization or talking under breath, and location of hands, while each child was working on the different strategies. After each session, I reflected upon what I observed in a journal and referred to the field notes and journal to help me to remember how each session went with both students. I also gave Brian and Sara a survey to determine which strategy they liked best, which strategy they preferred to use, and which strategy helped them to remember the new words. Each student also completed a pre-assessment to determine how many sight vocabulary words they already know with automaticity before we started working together. At the end of our time together, the students completed a post-assessment to determine if any new words taught were secured in their sight memory bank. Students read books and I observed if any new sight vocabulary words were being used in context.

Data Analysis

This analysis is based on field notes, active observations, survey, and pre/post assessments collected during seven sessions of working one-on-one with both Brian and Sara. After examining these sources I looked for commonalities amongst them. I found the field notes to be the most helpful in developing my findings because those were based on active observations, conversations, and behaviors that each child exhibited during our time together. The pre/post assessments were also valuable because they showed signs of improvement in sight word recognition.

After analyzing all of the data collected during this project, I identified three themes: self-correcting, applying words in context, and self-reflection. These reoccurring themes were interrelated and interconnected and proved to be important in determining how emergent readers learn and apply newly taught sight words.

Findings and Discussions

Looking at the pre-assessment data from the Dolch Word Lists (Appendix A), Brian scored highest on list one, knowing 13 out of 20 words. As I resumed assessing Brian, he continually decreased in the amount of words he knew with automaticity scoring 7 out of 20 on list two and 6 out of 20 on list three. In the beginning of the assessment, Brian tried to figure out the words by sounding them out, but as the word reading progressed, he began skipping more and more words to finish the task.

Similar to Brian, Sara scored highest on list one during the pre-assessment data. Sara knew 14 out of 20 words with automaticity and then also showed a significant decrease on list two, knowing 5 out of 20 words, as well as on list three knowing 7 out of 20 words. Sara attempted to

read every word from each list, by either sounding out or guessing the words when she was unsure.

As a result of the initial testing, I discovered that Brian and Sara either skipped or guessed unknown sight words. They also relied heavily on sounding out unknown words that at this point in first grade should be known with automaticity.

In reviewing the data collected from various sources the themes of, self-correcting, applying words in context, and self-reflection emerged and, provided me with information relative to my research topic of learning and applying newly taught sight words in context.

Self-Correcting

Self-correcting is a strategy that students need to apply while reading. It signals that the student is monitoring his/her reading which ultimately aids in comprehension. Struggling readers tend to skip, sound out, or guess when they get stuck on words while reading. This makes it difficult for students to understand what they have read as comprehension becomes confusing and frustrating to the reader.

My pre-assessment findings indicated that, Brian and Sara relied heavily on sounding out, skipping, or guessing when they came to an unknown sight word; rarely did they self-correct. As I worked with Brian and Sara over several sessions using both the copy, cover, compare and incremental rehearsal strategies, I began to notice they were self-correcting more than sounding out or guessing the new words. This suggests that perhaps they are attending to print details which increases the likelihood of either reading the words accurately or self-correcting. For example, in the pre-assessment Sara said, “it” for “at”, “my” for “me”, and “when” for “with,” not recognizing that the word she said didn’t match the actual printed word. During our practice

sessions using the incremental rehearsal strategy, Sara was able to correctly identify the above words fluently and with automaticity, self-correcting as needed. Brian had similar difficulties saying, "you" for "up", "no" for "not" and "he" for "her," ignoring the print details of each of the words and often resorting to guessing when unsure. Using the incremental rehearsal strategy, however, Brian consistently attempted to self-correct words that caused him difficulty.

Throughout the familiar reads, Brian and Sara began to self-correct words in context on a regular basis. For example, while reading the text *I Had to Look*, Sara said:

Student: "We have to look for the scarf."
Student: "Wait that's not right…"
Student: "We **had** to look for the scarf. It is as yellow as a banana."

Sara was able to self-correct "have" for "had" by realizing that her sentence didn't look right. I went on to ask her how she knew the word "have" was not right and she said, "There is no 'd' at the end of "have" so I went back and fixed it" (field notes, 6/21/2010).

In the book *Look at Me* Brian said:

Student: "Look at me I am a pilot. Look at his. He is a clown"
Student: *Paused. Looked at me then looked at text.*
Student: "Look at me I am a pilot. Look at **him**. He is a clown."
Student: *Smiles and reads on.*

At the end of the story, I asked Brian why he smiled after reading the page about the clown. He told me, "Because I fixed it." Then I asked Brian, "What did you fix?" He said, "The word him. I said it wrong the first time" (field notes, 6/22/2010). Brian attempted to self-correct words in context, but continued to rely on teacher prompts for reassurance.

At the beginning of the sessions with Brian and Sara I also noticed both of them subvocalizing while attempting some of the new words. Often sounding out was used as well. To help Brian and Sara understand that the words being taught were words they needed to know automatically, I implemented a "snap" cue to signal that these were sight words. A snap cue is when a reader comes to a word and hesitates or pauses. You snap your fingers and remind them this is a sight word that they should know automatically. This helps the child to think about what the word could be instead of getting bogged down and relying on sounding out or guessing. As a visual, auditory, and tactile cue, this often helped Sara and Brian to self-correct when unsure as opposed to skipping, guessing, or sounding out.

Applying Words in Context

Applying words in context is what teachers want children to do once they have been introduced to new sight words. It shows that a child has secured these words into his/her sight word memory "bank" and is able to recognize and read them automatically. Struggling readers have difficulty recognizing these words in context and often sound out, thus impeding their comprehension of a text.

During the sessions with Brian and Sara, I used word hunts and familiar reads to reinforce in context the newly taught sight words. Throughout our sessions together, it appeared that Brian struggled more than Sara with transitioning newly taught sight words from isolation into context. At times, Brian relied on teacher prompts to help him. For example, after the word "but" was introduced to Brian using the incremental rehearsal strategy, I asked him to go on a word hunt for this word. Brian did not respond or begin the task, and looked at me for guidance. I knew he

was having difficulty with this task so I asked him what word he was looking for. He said 'but', then asked me "What does 'but' look like?" I went on to prompt him:

Teacher: What does 'but' start with?

Student: 'b'

Teacher: What does 'but' end with?

Student: 't'

Teacher: Ok, now let's go find the word 'but'.

Brian looked for the word, but it took him a few times before he was able to locate the word correctly (field notes, 6/17/2010). Some of Brian's difficulties with learning new words are related to his confusion with certain letters such as: b, d, and p. In addition, he tended to rush through the task which may have caused him to miss a word he was searching for. During other sessions, however, he was able to remember a number of words that were previously introduced as well new words such as: "she", "that", "with", "her" and "all." This might be due his feeling more confident with words that didn't have letters that confused him.

Sara, on the other hand, appeared comfortable and confident as she searched for her words during the word hunt. After practicing the words with Sara using the two strategies, she was able to correctly locate such words as: "some", "look", "that", and "they." When I asked her to read the texts, she remembered the words previously taught as well as the new words.

Familiar reads were used as warm-up reading before and after each strategy. Familiar reads are stories that the children have previously read. The purpose of using familiar reads were to reinforce sight vocabulary words in the following ways: as part of the word hunts, fluency practice, and teacher-directed activities such as highlighting, underlining, and framing. Brian and Sara enjoyed reading these texts and commented on how the words being taught were in the

books they were reading. For example, Sara said, "Reading books is easier because all my sight words I'm learning are in these books" (field notes, 6/17/2010). Brian also shared with me, "I was able to read this whole book without getting stuck on any of the words" (field notes, 6/15/2010). Both students noticed the connection between the words they were practicing in isolation and the words they were reading in the texts.

Self-Reflection

Self-reflection is important for both emergent and fluent readers and it is important for students to self-reflect before, during, and after reading. Eventually students need to independently set reading goals by reflecting on what they find most important, create written self-reflections, and have oral conversations about what they have read. Children should be thinking about their thinking; metacognition is thinking about who/why we think what we think.

Throughout this critical action research project, I had several conversations with both Sara and Brian about their thinking towards sight words. In the beginning of this project, Brian told me, "It's hard for my brain to hold sight words. I remember them for a minute, and then I lose it. It makes reading hard" (field notes, 6/15/2010). Sara also had a similar outlook to learning and remembering sight words. She said "I need help remembering the words, so it helps me to keep practicing and practicing. I love working with you and being a good reader" (field notes, 6/22/2010). Both Sara and Brian were able to reflect upon what makes learning sight words hard, which for both of them was being able to remember them.

In the beginning, both students lacked confidence in their abilities to learn new sight words. Brian often slouched down and when he wasn't sure of a word, he brought the card close to his face almost as if he didn't want me to know that he was having trouble. He would subvocalized,

talked under breath, to say the new word. Then as he kept repeating the word, he became more confident and comfortable saying it out loud. Sara, on the other hand, often held the card and then rolled her eyes and looked up. In one particular session when we worked on the copy, cover, compare strategy, Sara tried to remember how to write the word "some" so she rolled her eyes back. When I asked her what she was doing she said, "I am thinking about the word. I have an envelope that is stored with words in my mind. It helps me to remember these words, so I have to think back to what it looks like in my head. This helps me to remember" (field notes 6/22/2010). I think the "envelope" that Sara was referring to was what we call our sight vocabulary "bank." Sara reflected upon what could do to help her remember the words she learned. When Sara talked about the "envelope," I think she knew the word that had been introduced previously so she was trying to figure out the unknown word without guessing.

As the sessions came to an end, I administered a survey for Brian and Sara to complete to have them reflect upon which strategy they felt most comfortable using and which one they thought helped them the most. Brian enjoyed both the incremental rehearsal and the copy, cover, compare strategy, but he went on to say, "The incremental rehearsal strategy is the one I liked better because it helped me to learn my sight words better" (survey, 2010). Brian thought that this strategy helped him more because it repeated so he was able to see the words over and over again. Brian said that it helped the words "stick" in his head better than the other strategy did. Brian would prefer to use this strategy next year in second grade.

Sara's survey was the opposite of Brian's. Sara thought the copy, cover, compare strategy helped her learn her sight words better. She said it was because, "I got to read and write the words and the other one was just reading" (survey, 2010). Sara shared with me that writing the sight words helped her just as much as reading them because she becomes a better reader and

writer this way. Sara preferred to use the copy, cover, compare method next year in second grade.

Implications

Based on the findings from this action research project there were several implications that could impact the instructional environment for students in the classroom. These implications can offer suggestions and ideas for teachers as they develop strategies or methods for teaching sight vocabulary to emergent readers.

In the literature reviewed, teaching words in isolation proved to be an effective strategy for learning new sight vocabulary. As previously stated, Stuart et al. (2000) "found that sight vocabulary is most effectively taught explicitly, out of context, through flashcards, rather than through reading the words in books or through a mixed strategy of reading words in books together with the prior presentation of key words on flashcards" (472). Additionally, my research results from the pre and post assessments administered showed growth from each participant (Appendix A-Pre and Appendix B-Post), suggesting that the copy, cover, compare, and incremental rehearsal strategies were effective in acquiring new sight vocabulary words.

After conducting the study, reviewing the data, and reflecting on the research project as a whole, there were limitations and things I would have done differently. I would have taught each of the strategies individually instead of simultaneously. It was difficult to determine which of the two strategies showed more growth because both strategies were taught during the same session. Since there were a limited number of sessions, there was not enough time to rework the format of the tutoring sessions to allow for each strategy to be taught separately. I think the time restraint was a hindrance that impacted the learning, there was not enough time for me to

determine whether or not students would continue to consistently apply newly taught sight words in context. In addition, I would have liked more one-on-one sessions with Brian and Sara to track their progress over a longer period of time.

I also thought that the time of year was another factor that caused the students to be more distracted than usual. Working with the participants during the last week of school seemed to be a challenge. On occasion, Brian and Sara were preoccupied with end of the year activities such as, writing a note to next year's teacher, final social studies and science projects, and practicing readers' theatre scripts. This made it difficult to keep their attention during the tutoring sessions.

I learned that Sara and Brian had different opinions about which strategy they thought was more helpful in acquiring new sight words. This raised my awareness of the learning styles of individual students and the fact that different strategies work better for different students. What works for one student might not necessarily work for another and as a teacher you need to build a repertoire of strategies that encompasses at the very least auditory, visual, tactile, kinesthetic approaches. There needs to be more studies that focus on teaching sight vocabulary with different learning styles as opposed to "one size fits all."

We teachers need to take into consideration the learning styles of the students in their classroom when teaching sight vocabulary. Providing opportunities for students to use the newly taught sight words in isolation and in context through the morning message, interactive writing, sentence dictation, and during guided reading are some of the ways this can be done. Technology is also a great way to reinforce sight vocabulary. E-books, online games, SMART boards, and other electronic devices allow students to interact and practice in a hands-on way (Englert et al., 2005; Mechling, 2007; Korat, 2010).

Conclusion

"Reading is an essential component of education which has been linked to an inividuals' overall achievement and success over their lifetime. Students who have reading difficulties as early as kindergarten and first grade require explicit instruction to develop fluent decoding and word identification skills" (Norman & Wood, 2008). Many early literacy experiences focus on the use of basic sight vocabulary or high-frequency words that a student will encounter throughout his/her early years of learning. This action research project examined the methods in which to teach sight vocabulary to emergent learners.

As a classroom teacher and future literacy specialist, teaching sight vocabulary to emergent learners has been a topic of interest for me. The two strategies I selected from the literature were helpful for Brian and Sara in learning newly taught sight words and applying them into context. In the long term, however, acquiring and maintaining sight vocabulary could serve as a basis for future investigation. Perhaps this study will provide teachers with the information they need to determine what strategies work best for their particular students.

References

Conley, C.M., Derby, M.K., Roberts-Gwinn, M., Weber, K.P., & McLaughlin, T.E.., (2004). An analysis of initial acquisition and maintenance of sight words following picture matching and copy, cover, and compare teaching methods. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis,* 37, 339-350.

Dyson, A. (2008). The pine cone wars: Studying writing in a community of children. *Language Arts,* 85(4), 305-315.

Englert, C.S., Zhao, Y., Collings, N., & Romig, N., (2005). Learning to read words: The effects of internet-based software on the improvement of reading performance. *Remedial and Special Education,* 26(6), 357-371.

Flint, L.F., Coyne, E., Stiller, J., & Health, E., (2008). Variability in children's early reading strategies. *Educational Psychology,* 28(6), 643-661.

Gee, J. P. (2001). What is literacy? In E. Cushman, E. R. Kintgen, B. M. Kroll & R. M. (Eds.), *Literacy: A critical source book* (pp. 537-544). Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's.

Halliday, M.A.K. (1969). Relevant models of language. *Educational Review*, 22, 26-37.

Heath, S. B. (1982). What no bedtime story means: Narrative skills at home and school. *Language in Society*, 11, 49-76.

Huang, L.V., Nelson, R.B., & Nelson, D., (2008). Increasing reading fluency through student-directed repeated reading and feedback. *The California School Psychologist,* 13(6), 33-40.

Korat, O. (2010). Reading electronic books as a support for vocabulary, story comprehension and word reading in kindergarten and first grade. *Computers & Education, 55*(1), 24-31.

Larson, J., & Marsh J. (2005). Making literacy real: Theories and practices for learning and teaching. (pp. 1-17, pp. 100-125).). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Marvin, K., Rapp, J., Stenske, M., Nairim, R.R., Swanson, G.J., & Bartlett, S.M., (2010). Response repetition as an error-correction procedure for sight-word reading: A replication and extension. *Behavioral Intervention,* 25, 109-127.

Mechling, L.C., Gast, D.L., & Krupa, K., (2007). Impact of SMART board technology: An investigation of sight word reading and observational learning. *Journal of Autism & Developmental Disorders,* 37, 1869-1882.

Mesner, E.M., Duhon, G.J., Hogan, K., Newry, B., Hommema, S., Fletcher, C., & Boso, M., (2010). Generalization of sight word accuracy using a common stimulus procedure: A preliminary investigation. *Behavioral Intervention,* 19, 47-61.

Mills, G.E., (2007). Action research: A guide for the teacher researcher. (3rd edition). (pp. 103-105). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

National Reading Panel. (2000). Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction. *Reports of the subgroups.* NIH Pub. No. 00-4754.

Nist, L, & Joseph, L. (2008). Effectiveness and efficiency of flashcard drill. Instructional methods on urban first-graders' word recognition, acquisition, maintenance, and generalization. *School Psychology Review,* 37(3), 294-308.

Norman, R.K., & Wood, C.L., (2008). Effects of prerecorded sight words on the accuracy of tutor feedback. *Remedial and Special Education,* 29(2), 96-107.

Pearson, P. & Stephens, D. (1992). Learning about literacy: A 30-year journey. In C Gordon, G.D. Labercane, & W.R. McEachern (Eds.), *Elementary Reading Instruction: Process and practice* (22-43). Ginn Press.

Snow, C.E., M.S. Burns, & P. Griffin (Ed.). (1998). Preventing reading difficulties in young children. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Stuart, M., Masterson, J., Dixon, M. (2000). Spongelike acquisition of sight vocabulary in beginning readers? *Journal of Research in Reading,* 23(1), 12-27.

Appendix A

Dolch Word List Pre-Assessment:

Brian	**13/20**	**7/20**	**6/20**	**26/60**
Sara	**14/20**	**5/20**	**6/20**	**27/60**

Appendix B

Dolch Word List Post-Assessment:

Participant	Dolch List 1	Dolch List 2	Dolch List 3	Total Words Known
Brian	**19/20**	**9/20**	**6/20**	**34/60**
Sara	**20/20**	**16/20**	**10/20**	**46/60**