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How Can Implementing Oral Language Strategies Support First Grade Struggling Readers?

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HOW CAN IMPLEMENTING ORAL LANGUAGE STRATEGIES SUPPORT FIRST GRADE STRUGGLING READERS?

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Literacy Education

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To Kellen, for always supporting me, cheering me on, believing in me, and giving me the strength to get through anything I put my mind to. Knowing that I had you by my side gave me the will to push myself harder than I thought possible. You are amazing and I could not have completed this capstone without you!!

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Reading is a skill that people use every day in their personal and professional lives. As a first grade teacher I am tasked with the job of teaching students the basic reading skills they will need to become successful in literacy throughout their educational career and lives. This is a very daunting job that I do not take lightly and often feel unprepared for. This task becomes more challenging when trying to teach students who come to my class missing many of the vital literacy skills needed to begin the process of learning to read. Every year, I have students in my classroom who are learning English for the first time and often have not had access to books on a daily basis. I also have students who are coming to school every day with much bigger concerns than reading such as where they will get their next meal, who will be home when they get off the bus, and where they will sleep at night. With all these larger concerns facing many of my students I often feel as though I am lacking the necessary tools to guide them to reading success.

When I reflect on the reading needs of my students’ one unifying gap that continues to arise is a lack of oral language proficiency. My struggling first grade readers, who start the year with a wide range of oral language skills, often quickly make progress and growth. In comparison, my struggling first grade readers, who start the year with lower oral language skills, make progress at a much slower rate and, frequently stall out at a beginning of first grade reading level. This is a major concern and an area that I
professionally see as a place to improve my reading instruction. These observations have led me to wonder: *How can implementing oral language strategies support first grade struggling readers?*

The beginning of this school year marked the start to my seventh year of teaching first grade in a large urban school district. When I look back at my career thus far I feel confident that I am a much better teacher today, in all subject areas, than I was that first year of teaching. I see the growth in the flow of my lessons, the engagement of my students, and the outcomes of their learning. However, even with all of the success and improvements I have made, I still feel very inadequate in one area: the teaching of struggling readers. At the beginning of each school year, I tell myself that this is going to be the year that I figure out the best practices to use to help my students achieve reading success. By the end of every year, I feel a sense of failure and disappointment because I have not gotten my students as far as I needed. This sense of failure especially applies to the growth of my struggling readers who have limited oral language proficiency. The remainder of this chapter will focus on my own reading struggles, my professional journey as a first grade teacher in a large urban school district, and my motivation to delve deeper into oral language strategies for first grade struggling readers.

**My Personal Reading Struggles**

As an adult, reading is one of my favorite past times and one of the activities that helps me relax the most. I look forward to the end of the day when I can put on my pajamas and curl up on the couch with a cup of tea and my newest book. I love reading any type of mystery or suspense novel and often finish one or two books a week.
Reading now is an extremely easy task that comes naturally and is a daily part of my life; unfortunately this is not the way that I have always felt about reading.

As a first grader, reading was my least favorite part of the day. It was the part of the school day that made me feel worthless, dumb and inadequate. Nothing about reading came easily for me and every time I tried to read I would develop a huge headache. It became very clear to me early on in the year that I was not in the top reading group and was not able to do what many of my peers could do. This was a huge concern for my parents, especially for my mom who was a teacher and had been reading to me since I was born. Both my parents were extremely dedicated and spent countless hours at home reading to me and trying to build my confidence. The more I read, the more frustrated I would become until the point of tears. My reading struggles continued throughout my first grade year and by the end of the year conferences my teacher was recommending me for special education. I myself had also decided that I could not read because I was dumb and would never be able to read anything on my own.

These reading frustrations carried into second grade until finally the school nurse suggested that my parents take me to the eye doctor to get my vision more closely examined. At the eye doctor I found out that I had something called an astigmatism, which meant that my vision was still 20/20, but only if I squinted to help my eyes focus. Because I constantly had to squint to see the world around me, I was getting intense headaches that made it very difficult to focus or pay attention in class. My eye doctor recommended my parents get me glasses and my new pair of multi-colored specks came in the mail two weeks later.
At first, I was reluctant to wear my glasses and was worried that everyone would make fun of me. My parents and teacher patiently explained that they would not let others tease me and that the glasses were going to make my days at school less stressful and frustrating. Once I got over the initial reluctance to wear my glasses my reading slowly started to improve. All the words seemed much clearer and none of my regular reading tasks seemed as daunting. By the end of second grade, I was reading a little below grade level, but I had made significant progress. By the end of third grade, I had become one of the stronger readers in the class and was introduced to the genre of mystery novels. All of the sudden, I had confidence and believed that I could conquer any reading obstacle in my way. With the continuing support of my loving parents and their inability to give up on me, I had gone from a striving reader to a thriving reader in two short years.

My personal experience as a struggling reader proved to me that with the right supports, most students can learn to read and feel successful. Moreover, I think that it is amazingly important to work not only with your struggling reader, but also with their families to make a plan for success. I know that by working with my students’ families and providing them with rich oral language opportunities, I can create similar successes for my struggling first grade readers.

My Professional Journey

I started my journey teaching first grade in a small classroom on the end of a gloomy dark hallway. It was November and I was taking over a class that had already had four long-term substitute teachers that year. The students were extremely resistant to anything I tried and expected that if they were naughty enough I would leave like the
other teachers. By the end of January, I had finally built enough trust with the students to convince them that I was there to stay, but I had no idea where to start with my instruction. I did the best that I could and diligently followed the scripted reading curriculum to the letter. At that early point in my career I felt like I was teaching literacy best practices because I was doing everything the blue line master told me to do. Unfortunately, I did not differentiate or look at what my individual students might have needed. For the most part, I just tried to keep my head above water and stay on track with the pacing guide. My class that year was also designated as a Language Academy Classroom, which meant that many of my students had been in the United States fewer than two years. As a result, their English oral language skills were very limited and I really had no idea of how to help them. I felt like I was failing them on a daily basis, but was unsure of where to turn to help them make improvements.

By the middle of April I felt hopeless because I could tell that my students were not making as much progress as their peers across the hall in the two other first grade rooms. I tried to talk to the other first grade teachers about their reading instruction, but got brushed off multiple times and told that they did not have time to talk. I finished out that school year feeling like I had done my students a disservice and promising myself that I would strive every year to become a better teacher, especially in reading.

The following year, I moved to a charter school where eighty percent of the students spoke a language other that English at home. I was very excited to start the school year and begin building my knowledge around reading instruction for English Language Learners. At this school they used the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) to help guide their instruction for all subject areas, except for reading. I
was very disappointed to find out that for their whole-group and small-group instruction in reading they used a direct instruction curriculum that was also very scripted and rigid. Unfortunately, when using this curriculum there was little room for innovation or differentiation. Fortunately, I saw my students making more gains, but their oral language skills and comprehension skills remained limited. I felt like there were still many components missing from my reading instruction, but again felt at a loss as to what to do next. I especially felt inadequate when it came to giving my EL students the strategies to share their ideas and participate orally in class like their native English-speaking peers. How was I ever going to become a better reading teacher when everything I was teaching was highly scripted and prescribed?

I spent one more year teaching first grade at the charter school and then got a new job teaching first grade back in the large urban public district in which I had started. I felt very hopeful that maybe reading instruction had changed and evolved in the public school district since I had left it three years previously. My hope was quickly dashed when I started setting up my classroom that summer and saw the same scripted reading curriculum I had used my first year of teaching. I was upset and depressed about what to do with this same un-engaging and mediocre reading program that I had felt was ineffective instruction in the past. Fortunately, I was able to voice these fears to my new teaching partners and was relieved when they said that they did not follow the scripted plans, just adapted the books and materials to fit their students’ needs. Of course I thought this was a great idea and was shocked that I had not thought of doing this earlier. However, with limited experience teaching guided reading, I was merely trusting that the school’s curriculum would be the right way to go. Now that I knew that I did not have to
be a teaching robot, my next question was what did I need to do instead? I knew that I needed to do something different, however, I had no idea what best practices were for teaching first grade readers, especially first grade readers who spoke a language other than English at home and a majority who are living in poverty.

**Why Oral Language?**

Over the past three years I have been working diligently to find and research best practices for struggling readers, especially those students with limited oral language proficiency. I had been doing this research in my limited free time and often found that I got very little done because I always got consumed by my daily work to do list. At the beginning of last school year, I decided that I needed to dedicate specific time to researching best practices for elementary reading instruction with a focus on struggling readers. As a result, I set aside two hours a weekend to specifically study and review reading educational research. To begin with critical resources I began asking colleagues to recommend different reading resource books to help me start to develop a knowledge base around reading best practices. During this time I read the book *The Daily 5: Fostering Literacy Independence in the Early Grades* by Gail Boushey and Joan Moser and the book *The Next Step in Guided Reading: Focused Assessments and Targeted Lessons for Helping Every Student Become a Better Reader* by Jan Richardson. During this same period of time I also had the amazing opportunity to work with my districts Reading Recovery teacher leader. She worked with four of my students throughout the year in the Reading Recovery program and I got the opportunity to go observe lessons, debrief about what was working well for those students, and what adjustments we could both make to our reading instruction. These conversations were invaluable, especially
when we could discuss a reading strategy, I could implement it, and then she would observe me and give me constructive feedback. Our work together along with the support of the two texts I had read made me feel for the first time like I might be making progress toward becoming a successful first grade reading teacher.

I felt energized and ready to get started creating a framework for whole group and small group literacy instruction in my classroom. By the second week of school I was feeling much more confident about my whole group reading instruction and reader’s workshop format. Fortunately, my students also seemed engaged and excited to start reading every day. It was also obvious that they were building good independent reading stamina and self-monitoring skills. As I was teaching the rituals and routines of reader’s workshop, I was also administering the first grade reading benchmark tests. These tests were going to give me the data I needed to form small groups and identify how to tailor my reading instruction to fit the needs of this year’s group of students.

By the end of September, I had completed all of the reading benchmark tests and had my results. Out of twenty-three students, three students were on target and reading at a first grade level, five of my students were reading at a middle of kindergarten level, and fifteen of my students were reading at a beginning of kindergarten level. Of these twenty-three students, eighteen of them spoke a language other than English at home. This data momentarily shocked me, but then I decided that sitting around was not going to get my students or me anywhere.

As a result, I started devising a plan for instruction using the two previous texts I had read, my student data, and the support and expertise of my colleague who was our districts Reading Recovery teacher leader. While doing this, I quickly discovered that I
had a solid base of where to start my instruction, but needed a wider span of research to inform my decisions throughout the year. I also realized that I needed to examine more research on best practices for struggling elementary readers in urban settings who also had low oral language proficiency. If I were able to increase my students’ oral language scores and build their confidence to share orally would that help them tackle harder books and more complex language structures? What specific strategies could I as a first grade teacher implement whole group or in small group to foster the growth of oral language for my students, many of whom were also categorized as struggling readers? How could I give my students the tools they need to make reading gains throughout the year and not stagnate or get stuck at certain reading levels because of their lack of oral language or their inability to take on more complex language structures? All of these professional wonderings return me to my question: *How can implementing oral language strategies support first grade struggling readers?*

**Looking Ahead**

In Chapter Two, I will review the research done by the major leaders in the fields of early literacy, oral language development, and struggling readers. This research will ground my own action research study and help me identify targeted oral language strategies to use with my struggling first grade readers. In Chapter Three, I will explain and give demographic information about my school district, my school, and my action research participants from my first grade classroom. I will also provide a detailed explanation of the methods I will be using to conduct my action research, the tools I will use for assessment, and the strategies that will be implemented to support my struggling readers. Next, Chapter Four will present my results from my four-week action research
study. In this chapter, I will include pre and post assessment data and analyze the results of this data along with a description of how the action research process went while implementing my oral language strategies in my classroom. Lastly, in Chapter Five I will reflect on the limitations and implications of my research study and what I would do differently in the future. I will also look at other areas I may want to delve into in future research studies.
CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

One of my favorite things about being a first grade teacher is seeing the joy in a student’s eyes when they realize they are reading on their own. When my students feel successful for the first time and know that they have taken the first step in a long reading journey full of adventures, at times struggles, and hopefully a journey of lifelong learning. I cherish every one of these moments and all of the hard work that happened to make their independence and success a reality. For some of my first graders this moment happens in kindergarten, for others it happens at the beginning of the year or in the middle, but for others, the process takes longer and is a significant challenge.

Unfortunately, reading does not come quickly or easily for several of my students. Often, there are first graders who come to school with limited language experiences and time at home with texts. Frequently, these students fall into the category of struggling readers. As a teacher, I am continually looking for strategies to support struggling readers so they too, can feel moments of joy and success when reading that first book on their own.

One key aspect to reading success I have observed over my last seven years of teaching first grade is a strong background in oral language. Students, who come to my classroom with a variety of opportunities to talk and discuss topics with adults and peers at home, clearly have a stronger base of vocabulary and language skills to build upon. This base makes it easier for them to tackle more difficult language structures that start to appear in first grade reading books. It also allows them to be able to not only decode
their books, but truly comprehend them. On the other hand, my struggling readers often
do not have a strong language base and experience limited language opportunities. These
observations have led me to ask the question, How can implementing oral language
strategies support first grade struggling readers?

To help support my professional growth as a teacher of struggling first grade
readers, I started doing more research around oral language and struggling readers. In so
doing, I quickly discovered that oral language is a very broad topic with its own
categories and sub-categories. However, for the purpose of this capstone I decided it
would be best to first define oral language, then further examine the aspects of oral
language that affect reading development of young readers, and lastly, research which
oral language strategies can best support reading development. In this literature review, I
also explored research around first grade struggling readers and effective instructional
practices. As a result, this chapter will reveal my research findings and explain the major
themes that arose from the leaders in the field of literacy.

Defining Oral Language

Oral language is a concept that many people have heard, but few understand or
truly know how it is defined. Lesaux & Harris (2015) defined oral language as the
“system through which we use spoken words to express knowledge, ideas, and feelings”
(p. 1). Within this system Lesaux and Harris (2015) describe five categories in oral
language: vocabulary, syntax, morphological skills, pragmatics, and phonological skills. They defined:

- Vocabulary as the ability to understand the meanings of words or phrases.
• Syntax as the ability to understand the order of words and grammatical rules.

• Morphological skills as the ability to understand different word forms and parts.

• Pragmatics as the ability to understand communication and the social rules that accompany it, and phonological skills as the ability and awareness of sounds.

Each of these skills is needed to help students improve their listening, speaking, and writing. The development of each skill also fosters students’ abilities to handle text and eventually read independently.

**Effects of oral language on reading development.** In an ideal academic setting every student would come into kindergarten with vast literacy experiences and oral language knowledge development. This is often not the case and students who do not have as many oral language opportunities have been shown to struggle more academically than their peers Balajthy & Lipa-Wade (2003) contend,

“Limited literacy experiences prior to starting school may place students at a disadvantage for formal instruction in reading and writing. That is, they may not enter school with a well-developed oral language base. They might have had limited literacy experiences in their home environments with less that average time spent listening to stories or participating in conversations with adults and other children” (p. 71).

These limited experiences can greatly affect a student’s ability to take on more complex text and make continued growth in their reading development.
Gillam, Reutzel & Squires (2013) point out one factor that can greatly impact a student’s progress in early literacy is phonemic awareness (PA). They define phonemic awareness as “the awareness of sound units (words, syllables, onset, rimes, and phonemes) in the oral speech stream” (p. 402). One area that can impede students’ abilities to successfully gain competence in phonemic awareness is oral vocabulary. Oral vocabulary is made up of all of the spoken words or concepts a student is familiar with and knows. Usually oral speaking vocabulary is broken up into two areas: expressive vocabulary and receptive vocabulary. Gillam, Reutzel, and Squires (2013) define expressive vocabulary as the words a child uses on a daily basis when speaking or writing and they define receptive vocabulary as the words that a child understands when they hear or read them, but do not yet use in their speaking and writing. Receptive vocabulary is developed first, followed by expressive vocabulary. The size of a student’s receptive vocabulary is affected by the amount of language they are exposed to and have had a chance to engage in. Furthermore, Gillam, Reutzel, and Squires explain,

“In other words, a child with a small oral vocabulary is likely to process words holistically with a focus only upon meaning, while children with mature oral receptive vocabularies will also recognize that these same words contain several linguistic units such as syllables and phonemes. Thus, if a child has a limited oral language receptive vocabulary, it is likely to negatively affect his or her ability to participate successfully in PA [Phonemic Awareness] activities” (p. 408).

This research highlights the importance that oral language and a child’s exposure to vocabulary can have on reading achievement, especially in the beginning stages of literacy instruction. As teachers what can we do to help fill these gaps? More
specifically, *How can implementing oral language strategies support first grade struggling readers?*

**Oral language strategies.** To help facilitate student growth for students who have lacked literacy opportunities it is crucial for the teacher to have a well developed literacy plan with strong oral language building activities embedded in it. Dixon (2008) supported this by revealing, “Children who grow up in environments where adults engage in meaningful conversations with them develop knowledge of how language works. We know that linguistic responsiveness in adult-child interactions serves as a support to children’s language development” (p. 5). As teachers we cannot change the environment where our children grow up or expand the language opportunities they are exposed to, however we can alter our literacy instruction to support struggling readers in meeting their individual language needs. To begin to develop a cohesive and differentiated plan the first important step a literacy teacher must take is getting to know his or her students.

Clay (2014) discusses, in depth, that teachers who focus on what their diverse learners already know will have a much more productive starting point to meet their students’ learning needs compared to teachers who focus on student deficits. By digging deeper and getting to know students on an individual level teachers can identify students’ prior learning, what they can do, and help them make clearer the things they already know. This idea helps foster students’ meaning making and connects their personal experiences to new experiences in school that can broaden their oral language skills.

Clay (2014) articulates, “Remarkable learning has already occurred before children pass through the school doors. Even those who are most reluctant to speak have learned a great deal about the language of their community (p.2).” Therefore, it is our job as
educators to discover what our students’ strengths are and what they already know through thoughtful, open-ended discussions in our classrooms. We cannot replace the language that has been missed at home, especially adult to child conversations, but we can provide opportunities for all our students to be meaning makers and use their language skills to access learning.

One of the most effective ways to increase students’ oral language is with one on one conversation with adults. However, this is not a realistic format for classrooms where there is often one teacher and twenty-five or more students. To continue to facilitate productive conversation and increase the number of times students get the chance to express their ideas through talk Clay (2014) has made the five following recommendations for classroom teachers looking to foster more meaningful language opportunities:

• Increased wait time
• Joint focus on what is already known
• Teachers and students negotiating meanings and uncovering confusions together
• Quality interactions that personalize the conversation, and grounding the talk in experience to extend the learner.

What do these five recommendations for increased talk look like in a classroom setting and how can they help struggling readers? In using wait time Clay (2014) points out that many teachers only wait one second before continuing the conversation or adding their own perspective. By giving students three to four seconds of wait time during discussion, children will be able to think about related information they know and how
they can more clearly articulate their ideas. Wait time is also important for students during reading because it gives the student time to work out what they are reading and self-correct instead of getting the answer from a teacher or other adult in the classroom.

When picking a topic of discussion or asking an open-ended question, teachers should always look for a joint focus. A topic the student already knows about and can act on. By doing this it is easier to expand on vocabulary and meaning making because the teacher is grounding the talk in a subject in which the student already some level of competence. To go right along with this, teachers and students cannot come to a joint focus if the teacher does not know his or her students. To dig deeper into this, Clay recommends, “Teachers need to find out what their students are understanding and can do, as students put their thoughts into words” (p. 30). She contends that conversations between teachers and students will not be successful if teachers do not understand the home culture of the child. This is where misunderstandings can occur and trust can be lost, which in turn can cut off the flow of meaningful discussion and dialogue. For both teachers and students to negotiate meanings, a deeper level of trust and understanding must be present.

To put all of this student knowledge and relationship building into practice to impact student reading achievement, teachers must also have quality interactions with students that personalize the conversation and do not just individualize it. In most classrooms there are pressures placed on the limited time in the day for teachers to foster personalized conversations. Clay states, “Some manage extended conversations with children, but there is always the press of more help needed and too little time to give it. Then the interactions become abrupt and abbreviated, and do not extend the child’s
power to express thoughts in language” (p. 30). Additionally, another recommendation to help avoid rushing conversation is to work with students in small groups of three to four where you can ask open-ended questions and have more time to personalize the talk based on the student responses and dialogue.

The fifth recommendation made by Clay to increase talk was grounding the talk in experience and using these experiences to extend the learners’ thinking even farther. By extending the students’ talk and pushing them to link their understandings to new learning, teachers are able to allow students to engage in language where they are at and increase students’ abilities to make meaning of what they are reading and learning. Clay stresses that to find out what our students know, we need to talk with them often and give them increased opportunities to express themselves verbally. Educators especially need to foster more talk with students who come to school with limited language skills because they need extra opportunities to talk if they are going to continue to make reading gains and make meaning of their learning.

**Defining Struggling Readers**

A struggling reader is defined as someone who has difficulty understanding the meaning of printed words, lacks the ability to implement reading strategies effectively, or can read words, but cannot understand their meaning or how they link together in text (Balajthy & Lipa-Wade, 2003). Frequently, these students have a variety of reading needs or holes in their literacy development that need to be identified and diagnosed. Each struggling reader is different and has different reading strengths and weaknesses. Compton-Lilly (2008) stressed the importance of teachers of struggling readers not just focusing on the students academic differences, but also looking closely at a student
background and life experiences. In addition, when creating a plan for a struggling reader, teachers can use the student’s personal interests, passions, and experiences to create instruction that will support the child both academically and culturally.

Supporting struggling readers. After reviewing the literature from the leaders in the field on struggling elementary readers, three main themes have arisen. The first theme that emerged was the importance of giving struggling readers ample time to read and targeted work on basic literacy skills. The second theme was the importance of having well-trained and experienced teachers leading literacy instruction. Lastly, the literature stressed the importance of giving struggling readers the opportunity to engage in high-level discussion and reading tasks.

The first theme in supporting struggling readers is the importance of ample reading time and targeted skill work. In the hustle and bustle of classroom life, where teachers are juggling multiple subjects and overwhelmed with the daunting tasks of differentiating lessons for twenty plus learners, many struggling readers are getting left behind. Struggling readers are often given tasks that do not fit their reading needs and often do not include any reading. According to Chard & Kameenui (2000), “Specifically, current reading instruction may not provide adequate opportunities to apply and practice knowledge and skills for students who are struggling to learn to read” (p. 36). For at risk readers to flourish and make reading gains, they recommend that students be engaged in actual reading, both independent and oral, throughout their reading instruction. To support reading development, students should also be engaged in reading tasks that include phonemic awareness, alphabetic knowledge, and decoding. For example, in a classroom with twenty-five students this would be broken up between small group
instruction and independent work time. Furthermore, Chard & Kameenui explained that during small group instruction, which they classified as working with a group no bigger than four, the teacher would be providing ample opportunities for students to read and apply basic literacy building block skills such as letter-sound correspondence activities. By building a solid base of basic literacy skills and time with real texts, struggling readers have the opportunity to get back on track.

Catching struggling readers up to their classmates is an imperative goal that all teachers should have in mind when creating their lesson plans. Chard and Kameenui’s research found that children who do not display good reading skills in first grade had a 90% chance of remaining poor readers after three years of school. Unfortunately, these children began to dislike reading and read much less than more successful readers both in and outside of school.

The second theme that is crucial for supporting struggling readers is the difference well trained literacy teachers make. Teaching students to read, especially struggling readers, is a complex and complicated job that many teachers feel unprepared for when starting out in their career. In this article, Allington (2002) shared six traits he believes all exemplary literacy teachers possess. He called these six traits, “the six T’s of effective elementary literacy instruction”.

According to Allington, the first trait that he described was time. Successful classrooms teachers had their students spending at least 50 percent of their day involved in some kind of reading or writing task. He added that, “Their students did more guided reading, more independent reading, more social studies and more science reading than students in less effective classrooms” (p. 742).
The second trait focused on teachers’ uses of texts. The exemplary teachers that Allington studied gave their students access to a rich supply of texts from multiple genres that students were able to read with high levels of accuracy.

The third trait Allington referred to was the quality of teaching they received. To get students where they need to be in reading they have to see good models of what an effective reader does and the moves that they make. He asserts,

The exemplary teachers in our study routinely gave direct, explicit demonstrations of the cognitive strategies that good readers use when they read. In other words, they modeled the thinking that skilled readers engaged in as they attempt to decode a word, self-monitor for understanding, summarize while reading, or edit when composing. (p. 743)

Allington’s fourth trait of exemplary teaching was talk. In classrooms where students were honing their literacy skills, high levels of talk and discussion were present. Allington (2002) observed that in classes where students were making meaningful reading progress their teachers were asking more open-ended, higher level questions where the goal was not to get one right answer, but to encourage thoughtful discussion among students.

The fifth trait of exemplary teachers observed by Allington was task. In literacy rich classrooms students need to be engaged in tasks that are meaningful and tailored to each individual student. In the classrooms he observed, teachers gave out longer assignments that were far more challenging than filling out a worksheet. In addition, Allington noticed that students usually had some type of choice as to what their task was or the topic of their task.
The sixth trait of an exemplary teacher is testing. Allington stated, “Exemplary teachers evaluated student work and awarded student grades based more on effort and improvement than simply on achievement” (p. 745). Because of their focus on the gains of every individual student Allington reported these teachers did not waste days and hours on test preparation. He explained that exemplary teachers believed that their students would learn the skills on the test from good instruction and the focus on individual growth.

If teachers have the training and support they need, every teacher can support struggling readers and use the six T’s of exemplary literacy instruction. Allington (2000) emphasizes that when teachers have the courage to step away from pre-packaged reading programs and look at the needs of each individual student their literacy instruction will flourish. All of his six traits also support the needs of struggling readers and can help them find their way on their literacy journey.

The third theme for supporting struggling readers is including high-level discussion for all readers in the classroom. In this article Allington digs deeper into reading moves that are both influential and detrimental to early literacy instruction. His main focus in identifying influential teaching moves was the need for high levels of discussion. Allington (2014) stated, “This research suggests that teachers must begin to develop expertise in initiating and managing classroom discussion” (p. 18). In his research he found that in high-poverty schools, with many struggling readers, the teachers who were most effective asked five-times as many higher level discussion questions and offered twice as many opportunities for classroom discussion, compared to their less effective colleagues.
According to Allington, one of the most powerful teacher moves identified in the early elementary grades was “turn, pair, share”. This activity allows students to share their thinking about what they are reading out loud with a partner. In turn, they also get a glimpse of what other students in the group are thinking about while reading the same text. By starting routines like this in the classroom, teachers are able to introduce a higher volume of meaningful talk and discussion into their instructional diet.

**Instructional Best Practices**

No struggling reader, or any reader for that matter requires the same set of instructional best practices to become successful readers. Compton-Lilly (2008) explained, “The difficulty in teaching struggling readers is that they are all different and they differ on myriad dimensions” (p. 671). They contend that, every student comes with their own set of needs and background knowledge we as teachers are responsible to get to know, so we can create the best instructional plan for each individual. As educators we need to hold all of our students, especially our students who are struggling, to high literacy standards and provide them with proven instructional best practices that will help them flourish.

Furthermore, Allington (2013) explains that students who are having difficulty learning to read require “high-quality reading lessons, lessons in which they have texts they can read with an appropriate level of accuracy and in which they are also engaged in the sort of work we expect our better readers to do” (p. 527). In the following sections I will describe literacy strategies that support the oral language needs of struggling readers and provide support in designing instruction that can meet needs of all students. These
instructional practices also support my question, *How can implementing oral language strategies support first grade struggling readers?*

**Talking drawing strategy.** This strategy is designed to activate students’ prior knowledge and give them an opportunity to share their ideas with a partner orally with the support of a picture of their own creation. Paquette, Felio, & Jalongo (2007) explain “In the pre-learning drawing phase, students are introduced to the topic of study. Students share what they ‘think’ they know about that topic” (p. 66). First of all, to share their understanding, students are given thinking and drawing time where they draw or record all of the things they know about the new topic. They further explain that after they have finished their drawing the student then shares their knowledge with another student. This is all done before any texts or new information is presented to the students. The partner sharing gives students a safe and engaging way to share their prior knowledge orally with a partner and it gives the teacher a good idea of what students already know and opportunities to address any misconceptions they might have.

After the unit of study is over students are then given time to reflect on their learning. To do this, students go back and reflect on their pre-learning drawing and either add to it or complete a new drawing representing their new learning about the topic. The comparisons of the before and after learning drawings can be accomplished in small groups or with a partner (Paquette, Felio, & Jalongo, 2007). It is important that the students compare their first and second drawings so they can see all their new learning. By comparing their drawings and orally sharing their learning they are able to not only build confidence in oral language skills, but they are also able to experience the power of literacy in the learning process. After all of the partner and small group sharing the
teacher can display the drawings or create a larger class chart summarizing the students’ knowledge. This can be used before and after the unit of study.

Paquette, Felio, & Jalongo (2007) also point out that the “Talking Drawing strategy is particularly well-suited to differentiated instruction goals because much of the task depends upon the emergent literacy skills of talk and drawing, thus enabling children who struggle with reading to experience success” (p. 67). This further supports struggling readers because it allows them to feel successful and share their ideas in a way that feels comfortable, yet still promotes new learning with discussion building.

**Turn-and-talk strategy.** In the turn and talk strategy, students are given time to process a specific part of a book or new learning with partner discussion. In this strategy, students are given a discussion stem or asked a higher-level question and then they are asked to turn to a partner sitting close to them to discuss their thinking. Turn and talks can be planned for specific parts of the book or they can be spontaneous when the teacher sees the need to either encourage more talking or give everyone a chance to feel like their ideas are being heard (Nichols, 2006). More specifically, “The practice of turn-and-talk allows children to share in person-to-person interactions and engages struggling readers in meaningful conversations about thinking during reading” (Vlach & Burcie, 2010, p. 524).

These structured conversations between partners not only help students comprehend what they are reading better, but they also allow them to share their thinking orally and practice their speaking and listening skills. Nichols (2006) also points out that these conversations between partners give students the opportunities to make their ideas stronger with input from a peer or think about other ideas they had not previously thought
of on their own. Lastly, as Nichols reports, they give ELL students a chance to “translate their thinking into English or access vocabulary with partner support” (p. 68).

By developing students’ ideas and having them discuss their thinking also supports the larger whole group discussion of the book or topic. This strategy gives students a higher level of support in facilitating discussion and sharing their ideas. In addition, it allows students who do not feel as confident in sharing the opportunity to organize their thoughts and build their confidence in their ideas first in a small group setting. This level of support provides for greatly improved student engagement and the increased ability to have deeper and longer whole class discussions.

STaR (story telling and retelling) approach. This STaR approach is aimed at increasing students’ oral language and comprehension abilities. During this strategy the students and teacher complete six literacy activities all centered on a specific text. The text is chosen carefully to make sure it is engaging and fits in well with the class’s area of literacy study. Duffy-Hester (1999) detailed the six steps and the order that they should be completed:

- **Story introduction:** The teacher gives the students some preliminary information about the texts, asks for student predictions and highlights new vocabulary words that they will encounter.

- **Interactive story reading:** The teacher reads the text to the students while asking them higher level open ended discussion questions and pointing out key text elements.

- **Story structure review:** The teacher goes over the story with the students using summary questions to guide the discussion.
• **Group story retelling or individual story conference:** The students are given time to retell the story in groups or individually with another student or adult. They can use props or visual aids to retell the story if available.

• **Story critique:** The teacher encourages students to state their opinions about the text either orally or in writing.

• **Story extension activities:** The students are able to make personal responses to the text. These responses can be done through art, music, cooking, journals, or projects.

All of these six steps are an important part of the approach and can be completed over a few days or a few weeks depending on the text and the abilities or pace of the class. This strategy helps foster student engagement as well because it includes many active pieces where students are discussing and breaking apart the text. It also gives students aspects of choice in what ways they want to personally respond to the text at the end of the six steps.

**Language experience approach.** In the Language Experience Approach (LEA) a teacher asks a student to orally share with them a past experience. The teacher then writes down this sentence or story and works with the student to read the story. They read the story until the student feels comfortable and is reading it with accuracy and confidence. This approach is done in small groups and is recommended for readers who need support with their oral language. Balajthy and Lipa-Wade (2003) explain “The language experience approach” (LEA) is a powerful and natural way to introduce young children to reading. This approach makes a direct link between the students’ oral and
written language “(p. 41). The approach also helps span the gap between the student’s oral language and the author’s written language.

This strategy also gives appropriate student leveled texts to read in which they have a personal connection and are interested. The students are also given the opportunity to take time to do their own illustrations for their words during independent work time after group.

**Dialogic reading.** This strategy is commonly used to help students expand their vocabulary knowledge and broaden their understanding of a text or concept. In this strategy the teacher works with the whole group or a small group of students during a read aloud. Squires, Gillam, & Reutzel (2013) explain, “In this style of reading, the teacher asks the child increasingly difficult questions about the story. After the child answers, the teacher either reiterates or expands on the child’s response” (p. 403). This back and forth interaction can continue for the whole read aloud and can be carried over to a second day and second reading of the book. This strategy also allows the teacher to correct any student misconceptions about vocabulary or details of the book. By asking close ended questions and following them up with higher level open ended questions the discussion is raised to a deeper level and students are able to look more critically at what they are reading. Squires, Gillam, & Reutzel believe that incorporating vocabulary questioning activities into read alouds can help students develop a larger receptive oral vocabulary.

**Summary**

In this chapter I have defined oral language, presented research on the aspects of oral language that affect reading development, and provided examples of oral language
strategies that can support early reading development. I also examined the research around first grade struggling readers and which instructional best practices can be implemented to increase the success of all learners. The guide for this chapter and my focus was to support my question: *How can implementing oral language strategies support first grade struggling readers?*

In Chapter Three, I will lay out my plan for implementing the oral language strategies I identified in Chapter Two that I feel will have a positive effect on my students’ reading achievement. I will also provide a demographic background of my school district, my preK-8 school, and the student participants in my action research.
CHAPTER THREE

Methods

**Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I defined oral language, examined the aspects of oral language that affect reading development of young readers, and researched which oral language strategies can best support reading development. I also explored research around first grade struggling readers and effective instructional practices. Through this research I examined different teaching strategies that can be implemented to support struggling readers from varying backgrounds. The two strategies that I am choosing to focus in this capstone include: Talking, Drawing, Writing strategy and the STaR (story telling and retelling) strategy. Both of these strategies are designed to target primary age students who need more support both in their reading and oral language development. To examine the effectiveness of both of these strategies I will be conducting action research for four weeks in my first grade classroom with two of my guided reading groups.

In this chapter, I will explain the action research process that I carried out to answer my question: *How can implementing oral language strategies support first grade struggling readers?* The purpose of my research was to identify successful oral language strategies that can be used in small group guided reading lessons to help increase my struggling readers reading achievement and oral language competencies. Both of the strategies that I focused on will help increase the richness of discussion among my students, give them strategies for retelling texts, develop their confidence to share their ideas orally and in writing, and finally, increase their ability to read higher level texts.
Setting

I teach in a large metropolitan school district in Minnesota that serves an urban population of over 294,000 residents citywide. The school district has fifty-eight total schools with thirty-one PreK-5 elementary schools, six dual campus schools, five middle schools, five high schools, and seven K-8 schools. There are also thirty-five educational programs, which included twelve learning centers, twelve specialized programs, and ten early childhood special education programs. The district employs 5,376 full-time staff members, 3,135 PreK-12 teachers, 946 paraprofessionals, 1,068 support staff, and 227 principals and other administrative staff. My school district enrolls 39,241 students PreK-12 with demographics that include 31.5% Asian American students, 30.3% African American students, 22.5% Caucasian American students, 13.9% Latino American students, and 1.82% American Indian students. My school district has students who speak more than 100 languages and dialects with approximately 34% of students identifying as English Language Learners. The school district reports that 16% of their students receive special education services and 72% of their students are eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch.

I teach in a PreK-8 school in the district that has an American Indian Cultural focus, so it serves students from across the entire urban school district. My school enrolls a total of 634 students with demographics that include 26.7% Asian American students, 24.6% African American students, 8.2% Caucasian American students, 19.2% Latino American students, and 21.3% American Indian students. My school has 34.9% of students identifying as English Language Learners and 17.8% of students receiving special education services. We also have 94% of our students who are eligible for free or
reduced-priced lunch. My school is more diverse than the overall district and serves the majority of our American Indian students. We also have a 22% higher percentage of students who are eligible for free or reduced lunch prices than the district average. Identifying as a cultural focused magnet school, my school has citywide busing, which cuts down on the mobility rate of our student population. However, many of our students experience homelessness throughout the year or multiple residences within the city. Each grade level in the elementary has three, self-contained classrooms with an average of 25 students in each class. The elementary school also has a Lakota cultural specialist, an Ojibwe cultural specialist, a physical education teacher and a full-time media specialist. In the middle school, we have two teachers for each subject and one cultural language specialist for both Lakota and Ojibwe languages. There are three English Language teachers who serve students from kindergarten to eighth grade and five special education teachers.

Being an American Indian cultural focused magnet school we have some special qualities that draw not only American Indian students to our school, but students from all backgrounds from all over the city. The school has a weekly Drum and Dance session every Friday at 3:00 where students learn about traditional American Indian dancing and drumming. At this event all students are invited to dance and participate with some students doing drumming and other students dressing in traditional dance regalia. It is a special weekly event that helps bond the students and the school together in peace and strong cultural traditions. To teach about the American Indian culture all elementary and middle school students participate in either Lakota or Ojibwe language and culture class.
At our school we also hold monthly Indian Education Powwows where anyone from the community can come and dance and learn more about American Indian cultural practices.

We are a Responsive Classroom school that has implemented daily morning meetings, take a break spots and buddy rooms throughout our building. Our staff’s focus in Professional Learning Communities has been closing the achievement gap for our African American and American Indian students. To help support this goal, we have conducted Cognitive Coaching with our literacy coach and set SMART goals for each grade level team in literacy, math, and behavior management. These goals are reviewed monthly and monitored using student formative and summative assessment data and behavior management data.

Participants

For my capstone project, I will be conducting action research in two of my guided reading groups. All of the participants’ names have been changed to maintain student data privacy. As was previously shared, my research will focus on implementing the Talking, Drawing, Writing strategy and the STaR (story telling and retelling) strategy. I choose these two strategies based on the research I conducted around struggling readers and oral language development strategies. Additionally, I believe both of these strategies as being extremely beneficial for the specific needs of the struggling readers in my first grade classroom this year.

In my first grade classroom, I have 25 students. Demographically my 25 students are made up of 12 (48%) boys and 13 (52%) girls. In my class, 36% of my students identify as African Americans, 36% of my students identify as Asian Americans, 16% of my students identify as American Indians, eight percent of my students identify as
Caucasian Americans, and four percent of my students identify as Latino Americans. I also have 16% of my students receiving special education services and 32% of my students receiving English Language Learning services. Of my 25 first grade students, 88% qualify for free or reduced lunch.

In my school we use the MONDO Bookshop Curriculum, which includes large group mini lessons and small group guided reading lessons, shared reading lessons, and oral language lessons. This curriculum also has a phonics program that is implemented along with the reading program and also includes whole and small group lessons.

To conduct my research I chose two of my reading groups who were below first grade standards in both text level and oral language competencies. In first grade, to be considered proficient students should be reading at a Level I or J on the Fountas and Pinnell text level scale by the end of the year. According to the MONDO Bookshop Teacher’s Guide (p. 115, 2008) first graders should be able to orally repeat fifteen oral language sentences by the end of first grade. This assessment monitors their receptive language and gives the teacher insight into how students are doing mastering the structures of the English Language. All of the nine students in two reading groups that I choose to work with had a text level ranging from A to D and an oral language score between 2 and 11. These scores placed the students in my groups in the category of struggling readers. As my research question reveals, I wanted to look deeper into how using oral language strategies could impact their reading achievement.

**Participant #1:** The first student I chose for my action research was Willie. Willie is the youngest of ten children and his parents immigrated to the United States from a refugee camp in Thailand before he was born. Willie was born in Minnesota. He
speaks only Hmong at home and has many older siblings who guide and help him with his daily needs. Willie is an extremely friendly student who gets along well with his peers and has many friends. He is shy at times and does not often volunteer his ideas during whole group instruction. However, during small group instruction, he is talkative and seems comfortable speaking and sharing his ideas.

Willie is in the Eagles reading group along with four other students. In this group he is a leader and often takes charge when we are working on a project together or sharing our thoughts about the text we are reading. When I assessed Willie in January he was reading at a text level B and had correctly repeated seven out of 15 oral language sentences. He was proficient on the phonemic awareness assessment, letter recognition assessment, and word knowledge assessment. From my observations in small group and his assessment scores I deducted that Willie’s main reading barrier was his oral language skills in English.

Participant #2: The second student I chose for my action research was Connie. Connie is the middle child of a family of five children. She was born in Wisconsin and then moved to Minnesota. Connie speaks primarily Hmong at home and is new to our school this year. She is a very kind student who goes out of her way to help others. Connie has many friends in class and does a good job of following classroom behavior expectations. She is extremely shy in whole group lessons, but blossoms during small group time where she is often the first person to share. We have worked diligently on building her confidence in speaking English and her desire to share more ideas during whole group time.
Connie is also in the Eagles reading group along with four other students. In this group she feels comfortable to share and is often trying to help other students with their ideas. When I assessed Connie in January she was reading at a text level D and had correctly repeated four out of 15 oral language sentences. She was proficient on the phonemic awareness assessment, letter recognition assessment, and word knowledge assessment. From my observations in small group and her assessment scores I deducted that Connie’s main reading barrier was her oral language skills in English.

**Participant #3:** The third student I chose for my action research was Ryan. Ryan is the middle child of five siblings and was born in Minnesota. His parents speak both Hmong and English at home and Ryan receives speech services three times a week for 30 minutes with our speech pathologist. He is a very active student who struggles at times to stay focused, but is extremely friendly and willing to share his ideas. Ryan is not shy and often contributes to whole group discussions. His main goal is working on staying focused and he sits on a special wiggly seat to help him move, but continue his work.

Ryan is also a member of the Eagles reading group along with four other students. In this group he needs multiple redirections, but when focused, shares relevant and applicable ideas that improve the discussion. When I assessed Ryan in January he was reading at a text level E and had correctly repeated seven out of 15 oral language sentences. He was proficient on the phonemic awareness assessment, letter recognition assessment, and word knowledge assessment. From my observations in small group and his assessment scores I deducted that Ryan’s main reading barrier was his oral language skills in English.
Participant #4: The fourth student I chose for my action research was Seng. He is the youngest of six children and was born in Minnesota. Seng hears Hmong spoken at home, but he only speaks English and this is the predominant language spoken at home. Last year in kindergarten and this year in first grade, Seng received intensive interventions for oral language and speech articulation. These interventions have helped with Seng’s speech and the ability for others to understand him, but he still is extremely hesitant to speak and mostly says short two to three word sentences. At times, Seng also has difficulty retaining information and is unable to follow simple directions. His parents are very concerned about his academic progress, especially since they did not have any issues with his older siblings academically. Seng’s interventions are all carefully documented and the special education team will decide at the beginning of next school year if he should be assessed for speech services and a possible learning disability in reading. Seng is inspiring to watch in whole group and small group because he never stops trying and is always going out of his way to help others. He has really blossomed the last two months and is becoming more confident in himself.

Seng is in the Eagles reading group along with four other students. In this group he feels more confident in sharing his ideas, but usually only after being prompted by me. When I assessed Seng in January he was reading at a text level A and had correctly repeated six out of 15 oral language sentences. He was not proficient on any of the other grade level reading assessments scoring 32 out of 52 sounds on the phonemic awareness assessment, 47 out of 52 letters on the letter recognition assessment, 48 out of 55 sounds on the letter-sound correspondence assessment, and two out of 20 words on the word knowledge assessment. Seng’s needs are definitely higher and more complex than the
other students in his reading group and I am not confident in deciding what his main reading barrier is at this time.

Participant #5: The fifth student that I chose for my research was Tonya. Tonya is the younger of two children and is new to our school this year. She was born in New York and moved to Minnesota when she was a toddler. Her mother was born in Burma and immigrated to the United States before Tonya was born. Tonya only speaks Karen at home. She is a kind and energetic student who is always excited about learning new things. Tonya knew only a few words of English when starting first grade, but has learned a lot and can effectively communicate all her needs and wants in class. Tonya is still very hesitant to share her ideas in whole group discussion, but is always engaged in what is being discussed. We have been working on her confidence in sharing her ideas with the class and feel comfortable speaking to others in English. It is challenging for Tonya at times because no other students in our class speak Karen.

Tonya is also a member of the Eagles reading group along with four other students. At first, in this group she was extremely shy and it was difficult to get her to speak at all. Now that she has learned more English and has become more comfortable, she lights up in group and shares many interesting ideas. Tonya does a good job of asking clarifying questions when she is confused or unfamiliar with a topic. When I assessed Tonya in January she was reading at a text level A and had correctly repeated five out of 15 oral language sentences. She was proficient on the letter recognition assessment and word knowledge assessment. Tonya did struggle greatly during the phonemic awareness assessment and scored 20 sounds out of 52. From my observations in small group and her assessment scores, I deducted that Tonya’s main reading barrier
was her oral language skills in English and her ability to blend sounds in unfamiliar words.

**Participant #6:** The sixth student I chose for my action research was Dee. Dee is the youngest of seven children and was born in Minnesota. She speaks primarily Hmong at home, but does speak English occasionally with her older siblings. Dee is a very energetic student who is always talking with her peers. She greatly enjoys sharing her ideas and is almost always the first student with her hand raised. Dee needs a few reminders at times to stay on task during group time, but always adds great ideas to group discussions.

Dee is a member of the Buffalo reading group along with three other students. In this group she contributes a lot of ideas and wants to always be the first student to share. When I assessed Dee in January she was reading at a text level D and had correctly repeated 10 out of 15 oral language sentences. She was proficient on the letter recognition assessment and word knowledge assessment. Dee did have more difficulty during the phonemic awareness assessment and scored 42 sounds out of 52. From my observations in small group and her assessment scores, I deducted that Dee’s main reading barrier was her oral language skills in English and her ability to blend sounds in unfamiliar words.

**Participant #7:** The seventh student that I chose to be in my research study was Layla. Layla is the middle child of three and was born in Minnesota. She is Native American and is new to our school this year. The primary language spoken at home is English. At the beginning of the year Layla had a lot of anxiety issues with being at a new school and tried to leave the school grounds multiple times. I worked very closely
with Layla and the schools behavior support team to come up with a plan to help her be successful and feel comfortable at school. We came up with a daily chart broken down by each hour of the day and a check in system in the morning and afternoon with one of the behavior staff members. This plan has worked extremely well and now Layla does an excellent job of following directions and participating in class. In the beginning of the year, she would often have melt downs during reading time saying the she was stupid and could not read. Now reading is one of her favorite times and she is always begging me to go to the library to get a new book, especially if it is about horses.

Layla is also a member of the Buffalo reading group along with three other students. In this group, she gets very excited to share her ideas and often starts to talk over others because she cannot contain her enthusiasm. This is a major shift from the beginning of the year when she often refused to come to reading group at all. When I assessed Layla in January she was reading at a text level B and had correctly repeated 11 out of 15 oral language sentences. She was proficient on the phonemic awareness assessment and letter-sound correspondence assessment. Layla did have more difficulty during the letter recognition assessment scored 50 out of 52 letters and 10 out of 20 word knowledge words. From my observations in small group and her assessment scores I deducted that Layla’s main reading barrier was her oral language skills and her ability to decode unknown words.

Participant #8: The eighth student I chose for my action research study was Kayla. She is the youngest of three children and was born in Minnesota. Kayla speaks only English at home and identifies as being African American and Caucasian. She is a quiet student who took awhile to get comfortable sharing her ideas. Kayla is still hesitant
to share in whole group discussions, but shares willingly in small group. She is extremely kind and sensitive, which leads to her sometimes getting her feelings hurt easily by her peers.

Like Layla and Dee, Kayla is a member of the Buffalo reading group along with three other students. In this group, she does an excellent job of sharing her ideas, but sometimes needs prompting from me. She is the quietest member of the Buffalo reading group and I am always making sure she gets enough opportunities to share and does not get overwhelmed by the other group members. When I assessed Kayla in January she was reading at a text level B and had correctly repeated 11 out of 15 oral language sentences. She was proficient on the phonemic awareness assessment and letter recognition assessment. Kayla did have more difficulty during the letter-sound correspondence assessment scoring 38 out of 55 letter sounds and 10 out of 20 word knowledge words. From my observations in small group and her assessment scores I deducted that Kayla’s main reading barrier was her oral language skills and her confusion over which sounds match with which letters.

Participant #9: The ninth and final student I chose to be part of my research study was Sam. He is the oldest of two siblings and was born in Minnesota. Sam speaks English at home and identifies as being African American and Caucasian. As a toddler he witnessed his mother being abused by her boyfriend and was also the victim of abuse. These experiences caused him to have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which is accompanied with a lot of anxiety, angry outbursts, and defiant behavior in the classroom. To help Sam feel comfortable in class and stay on track his mother, the behavior team, and myself came up with a specific behavior plan. He checks in every
morning after breakfast with a behavior staff member, has a daily smiley face chart that gets sent home, and has a designated signal for when he is feeling angry and needs to take a calm break. These interventions have greatly helped him in the classroom, but he still has days where he struggles greatly with his behavior, which affects his ability to be engaged and focused in the classroom learning. When Sam is focused and having a good day he is a great helper and loves to share his ideas about whatever is being discussed in whole group or small group discussions.

Sam is another member of the Buffalo reading group along with three other students. In this group he sometimes refuses to participate because of extenuating factors, but when he does come to group he is engaged and excited to share his ideas. When I assessed Sam in January he was reading at a text level B and had correctly repeated 11 out of 15 oral language sentences. He was proficient on the phonemic awareness assessment and letter-sound correspondence assessment. Sam did have more difficulty during the letter recognition assessment scoring 50 out of 52 letters and 10 out of 20 word knowledge words. From my observations in small group and his assessment scores I deducted that Sam’s main reading barrier was his oral language skills and his inconsistent attendance at group.

Methods

To help delve into my capstone question: *How can implementing oral language strategies support first grade struggling readers?* I first chose two strategies from the research that I had done in the fields of oral language and struggling readers; the Talking, Writing, Drawing strategy and the STaR (story telling and retelling) strategy. Both of
these strategies were used over multiple days and lessons with a small guided reading group.

**Talking, drawing, writing strategy.** This strategy has many parts that happen over a three-day lesson cycle. As discussed in Chapter Two, the first part of the strategy is to have students share orally with a partner in their reading group their knowledge and ideas about a certain topic that is relevant to the new text that is going to be read. During this sharing time I as the teacher am recording the thoughts that are being shared in the students own words on an oral language recording sheet that I developed (Appendix B). After they have shared with a partner they then are given a blank piece of paper to draw their thoughts and ideas about the topic. Next, the students share this drawing with their partner and add anything they might have missed with their partners help. After, the group is introduced to the text and the students use what they already know from our drawings and our discussions to make predictions about the text. Then I read the text once with the students and they follow reading the text a few times on their own. After we have read the book the students go back to their drawings and add any new ideas. The group then works with me to write a sentence as a group that describes one new thing we learned about our topic.

In the next guided reading session we start with reviewing our drawings and sharing what we remember about the book with a partner. Next the text is reread with the focus being decoding and retelling. During this time I am listening to the students read and jotting down observations about their reading moves. When the group is done they practice retelling the story to their partner and then use their drawings to help them write
their own sentence about the topic. During the next step we share our sentences with the group.

On the third and final day of the group students start the lesson with retelling the text in their own words. During this time I am writing down the ideas they are sharing with their partners. We then reread the text again and add a second sentence to go with their drawings. This strategy allows students to make meaning by sharing their ideas orally, drawing what they already know and learn, and adding their own written sentences to help them put their ideas in their own words. It also is an effective way for me to see what knowledge they already have about the topic, correct any misunderstandings, and identify where I might need to add supplemental materials or information to fill in gaps in their understanding or vocabulary. This strategy will be implemented three days a week, for four weeks, with duration of twenty minutes. I will be using this strategy with both the Eagle and Buffalo reading groups.

STaR (story telling and retelling) strategy. This strategy also happens in small group reading instruction and has some elements that will overlap with the Talking, Drawing, Writing strategy. Therefore, I will be implementing both these strategies simultaneously over three lessons, with each lesson lasting twenty minutes. If needed, I will add a fourth day depending on the text topic and the needs of the students.

As highlighted in Chapter Two, in the STaR strategy Duffy-Hester (1999) detailed the six steps and the order that they should be completed in guided reading group. To review, these include:
• **Story introduction:** The teacher gives the students some preliminary information about the texts, asks for student predictions and highlights new vocabulary words that they will encounter.

• **Interactive story reading:** The teacher reads the text to the students while asking them higher-level open-ended discussion questions and pointing out key text elements.

• **Story structure review:** The teacher goes over the story with the students using summary questions to guide the discussion.

• **Group story retelling or individual story conference:** The students are given time to retell the story in groups or individually with another student or adult. They can use props or visual aids to retell the story if available.

• **Story critique:** The teacher encourages students to state their opinions about the text either orally or in writing.

• **Story extension activities:** The students are able to make personal responses to the text. These responses can be done through art, music, cooking, journals, or projects.

On day one of the lesson, the book is introduced by the teacher, new vocabulary is pointed out, and the students share their ideas and predictions about the story. This will fit in well with the students drawing their ideas about the text topic and sharing with a partner from the above strategy. Next, the teacher reads the book with pauses to point out text features or to ask guiding questions that are open ended to encourage discussion. After reading the text as a group, the students read it on their own with the teacher
observing. The lesson is ended with the teacher asking higher-level comprehension questions about the book and its elements.

On day two of the lesson, the students retell the story with a partner with the help of their drawings created the first day of the lesson. Next, the students reread the text and are encouraged to look at it with a critical eye. Students also discuss what they liked about the book, what they would change or identify any questions that came up for them while reading. Students can also end this lesson with rewriting the ending of the story in their own words.

On the third and final day of the book, students are given time to do a story extension activity. This is an activity where the students respond or share their ideas about the text by creating an art project, writing a song, doing a journal entry, or writing their own mini book about the topic. The story extension activity may need to happen in a fourth lesson to give students adequate time and not rush the other strategy activities. This strategy will also be implemented with the Eagle and Buffalo reading groups.

Data Collection Tools

To help collect my action research data I will be administering a pre and post assessment to the nine participants in my study using three assessment tools. I will administer the pre assessment before I start using my strategies and I will administer the post assessment after implementing my strategies for four weeks. To measure my students’ growth I will be giving them the Mondo Bookshop benchmark text level assessment, the Mondo Bookshop oral language assessment, and the Oral Language Acquisition Inventory Second Edition (OLAI2) story retelling assessment. The benchmark text level assessment will measure their overall text level and how the
strategies helped my struggling readers push themselves into reading harder level books. The oral language assessment will measure how well students can repeat fifteen sentences of differing degrees of sentence structure difficulty, which will tell me what amount of receptive language they have in English. The last assessment, story retelling, will show me how well my students can listen to a story being told to them using picture support and then retell the story orally including what happened in the beginning, the middle, and the end as well as the story elements.

Field Notes

To help ground my research and instruction I am also going to be taking field notes everyday while teaching my guided reading groups. These field notes will be recorded on an oral language sharing sheet that I have created and on a guided reading lesson plan template from Jan Richardson’s website http://www.janrichardsonguidedreading.com (Appendix A). On these templates I will be recording what students are sharing orally and any observations I make about their reading development and/or reading moves. In addition, I will be recording the questions I asked students about the texts and their responses. These notes will help show the steps I took in my guided reading lessons and the way that I implemented both strategies.

Resources

In my guided reading groups I will be using multiple leveled texts from the Mondo Bookshop curriculum. (Appendix D) These texts will be used in every lesson and there will be a copy of each text available for every student in my group. These books will also be used in the students’ daily independent reading book bags, so they can also read them independently on their own.
Summary

In this chapter I presented the demographic information for my district, my school, and my first grade classroom setting. I also provided a detailed description of each of my nine research participants. Lastly, I explained how I will conduct my action research and explained the two oral language strategies I used during my four-week research study.

In Chapter Four, I will be presenting the results of my action research along with my analysis of the data. I will also give a detailed description of how the implementation process of my two oral language strategies went with the two groups of my first grade struggling readers.
CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Introduction

In Chapter Three I discussed the two oral language strategies I used in my action research to help answer the question *How can implementing oral language strategies support first grade struggling readers?* I also gave a short background describing the district, school, and student demographics in my action research study and how they were chosen to be participants. This information set up the methods for my research and the background for how it would be conducted and laid out.

In Chapter Four I will summarize and analyze the results of my action research in my first grade classroom. First, I will present my pre-assessment data, what I noticed about this data, and what areas I want to see growth in during my action research. Then, I will discuss details of how the actual implementation of my two reading strategies went during small group reading instruction and describe any barriers or complications that occurred. Finally, I will conclude Chapter Four with presenting my post-assessment data after four weeks of implementing my two oral language strategies. I will analyze this data and summarize the growth made by my two reading groups made up of a total of nine students from my class.

Pre-Assessment Data & Analysis

Assessment tools. When pre-assessing my students I wanted to use assessments that showed their oral language proficiency and their reading text level. I thought both these parts of their literacy development were important in answering my question: *How
can implementing oral language strategies support first grade struggling readers? I wanted to see if implementing oral language strategies in my reading groups would positively impact my students’ English oral language scores and their ability to read higher-level texts. To assess these skills I administered the Mondo Bookshop oral language assessment, which included a group of 15 sentences that represent an example of varying structures of oral English. I read each sentence to my students out loud and then they tried to repeat as much of it correctly back to me as possible. The 15 sentences are broken into sets of five sentences, each set getting increasingly more complex in structure. I recorded their responses on the scoring sheet and then gave them a score out of 15. These scores gave me insight into how much control my students had over the different structures found in the English language and what structures they still needed more work on.

The second assessment that I administered was the Mondo Bookshop benchmark text level assessment. This assessment included a running record of an unseen text, a retell section of the text, comprehension questions about the text and a fluency measure with how many words the student can read in one minute. This assessment gave me a good idea of my students’ independent and instructional reading level along with their ability to retell and comprehend a new text. Finally, it showed me where each of my students were in respect to reading fluency.

The third and final pre-assessment that I administered was the story retelling section of the Oral Language Acquisition Inventory second edition (OLAI2). The purpose of administering this assessment was to provide an authentic way to measure and examine my students’ abilities to put sentences in a sequence to develop a logical story
with a clear beginning, middle, and end. In this assessment, the students are able to choose between two stories, *Popcorn and Mary* and *Mario and Miguel’s Messy Room*. I then read the story of the student’s choosing to them out loud while displaying the accompanying picture cards. The students’ were then given the four accompanying story cards and asked to retell the story. I recorded the students retelling the story with my iPad and then went back and wrote down what they retold and recorded the number of words they were able to reproduce. I also gave them a score out of four for the number of story elements named (characters, setting, problem, solution). The OLAI2 retelling assessment gave me a measure of my students’ abilities to listen to stories read orally to them for meaning and recreate this meaning by retelling the story orally back to me.

**Pre-assessment student data.** When assessing my nine participants in my action research study I did each assessment on different days to try and avoid testing fatigue or loss of focus. It took me three days to administer the assessments and two more days to score the assessments. It was difficult at times to conduct the assessments because I had to complete them in my classroom while my other students were independently reading or working. I have a class of first graders this year with extremely high emotional and behavioral needs, which made it difficult for them to work independently for more than a few minutes at a time. I team teach with the autism teacher during our literacy block and tired to conduct as many of the assessments while he was able to be in my classroom to support the needs of my other students. Even with disruptions, I was able to complete all three assessments for all nine students with relative ease and effectiveness.

The first assessment I administered was the Mondo Bookshop oral language assessment. The goal set by the Mondo Bookshop curriculum is to have all first graders
able to repeat all 15 sentences correctly by the end of first grade. In the table below are my pre-assessment results for my action research participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Reading Group</th>
<th>Oral Language Score out of 15</th>
<th>Home Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Willie</td>
<td>Eagles</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Hmong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connie</td>
<td>Eagles</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Hmong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seng</td>
<td>Eagles</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>English &amp; Hmong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonya</td>
<td>Eagles</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Karen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td>Eagles</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>English &amp; Hmong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Buffalos</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kayla</td>
<td>Buffalos</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layla</td>
<td>Buffalos</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dee</td>
<td>Buffalos</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Hmong</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on my students oral language scores it showed that Connie was considered in the pre-emergent range of oral language with a score within the zero to four sentence ranges. Willie, Seng, Tonya, and Ryan are all in the early emergent range of oral language with scores within the five to seven sentence ranges. All of these students were in the same Eagles reading group and they all speak a language other than English at home, with the exception of Seng who only speaks English, but hears Hmong at home. These scores showed that these five students have limited oral English control and need support from fluent, adult English speakers in conversations that incorporates higher-level questioning and discussion of texts. This pre-assessment data also clarified that using oral language strategies with the Eagles group is going to be an extremely important focus and will help improve their confidence and oral language skills, which is a need that all of these five students require.

Kayla, Layla, Sam and Dee all scored within the emergent reader range with oral language scores between 10 to 12 correct sentences. They all were in the Buffalos
reading group and Dee was the only student out of the four that has a home language other than English. Emergent readers are beginning to acquire a growing group of sight words and structures of the oral English language, but still require support in having higher-level conversations with fluent English adult speakers. This pre-assessment data showed me that oral language is a more concrete skill for the members of the Buffalo reading group, but I still know that as emergent readers they require increased support in their oral language development.

The second pre-assessment that I administered was the Mondo Bookshop benchmark text level assessment. By the end of first grade students are supposed to be reading at a text level I with fluency of 40 words per minute. They should also be able to retell the text in sequential order, if fiction, or retell three new facts learned, if a non-fiction text. The table below shows my nine research participants scores on the benchmark text level assessment that also includes a fluency and retelling component.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Text Level</th>
<th>Fluency (words per minute)</th>
<th>Retell/Comprehension (Out of Six)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Willie</td>
<td>Eagles</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connie</td>
<td>Eagles</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seng</td>
<td>Eagles</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonya</td>
<td>Eagles</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td>Eagles</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Buffalos</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kayla</td>
<td>Buffalos</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layla</td>
<td>Buffalos</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dee</td>
<td>Buffalos</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Using my student benchmark text level scores Seng, Tonya, Sam, Kayla, and Layla all fell into the early emergent reading range. From looking over their running records it is apparent that one of the biggest struggles for these five students was their
small amount of known high frequency words. Because of this, they spent most of their
time decoding the text, which negatively affected their fluency. They also used picture
support as their most effective way to approach unknown words, many times not even
looking at the first sound of the unknown word.

Dee, Ryan, Connie, and Willie’s benchmark text level scores put them in the
emergent reading range. All four students decoded easily and had a strong grasp of the
most common sight words. They struggled more with retelling the text and answering
comprehension questions. This kept them from passing into higher-level books on the
assessment.

The third and final pre-assessment that I gave was the story-retelling portion of
the OLA12. In the table below are the scores of my nine students based on the number of
words they could retell and the story elements they named. A transcript of Sam and
Connie’s actual retelling can be found in Appendix I.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Table 4.3 Story Retelling OLA12 Pre-Assessment</th>
<th>Story Elements Named</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Willie</td>
<td>Popcorn: 123 words, Mary: 21 words</td>
<td>13% 3 elements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connie</td>
<td>Mario &amp; Miguel: 18 words</td>
<td>12% 3 elements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seng</td>
<td>Mario &amp; Miguel: 16 words</td>
<td>10% 2 elements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonya</td>
<td>Popcorn &amp; Mary: 18 words</td>
<td>11% 2 elements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td>Popcorn &amp; Mary: 17 words</td>
<td>10% 2 elements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Popcorn &amp; Mary: 10 words</td>
<td>6% 1 element</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kayla</td>
<td>Mario &amp; Miguel: 39 words</td>
<td>25% 3 elements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layla</td>
<td>Mario &amp; Miguel: 16 words</td>
<td>10% 3 elements</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the OLAI2 scoring it categorizes readers into three stages: stage 1 (least experienced), stage 2 (basic), and stage 3 (most experienced). All of my nine students fell into stage 1 because they had a word count of less than 40%. These assessment scores showed that all of my students are still struggling with control of oral language structures along with the need to develop strategies that incorporate pictures as a support for comprehension and retelling.

Implementation of Strategies

I have implemented the Talking, Writing, Drawing strategy and the STaR strategy for the last four weeks with two of my guided reading groups, the Eagles and the Buffalos. I met with each group three times a week for fifteen to twenty minutes for each lesson.

The overall schedule of my groups was successful and I was able to fit in all of the lessons each week. During the lessons I struggled at times because of multiple interruptions from other students who were not in the group. These disruptions ranged from students coming over to ask me questions to students having severe behavior melt downs where I had to leave my guided reading group and intervene or call for support. When interruptions occurred I made sure I gave my group the next direction and they did a good job of continuing to work while I was assisting others.

The Eagles group was always excited and willing to come to group. They would come over to my guided reading table with smiles on their faces and could not wait to see the next text we are going to work on. They struggled at first with the partner-sharing
piece of both strategies and I modeled multiple times what I wanted it to look like. I also gave them sentence starters to help them dive into conversation right away. Both of these modifications helped greatly. Fortunately, by the end of the second week they were turning and talking about the text or their drawings with very little prompting or support. However, I did have to move their seats at the table to ensure that everyone got a chance to share with other members in the group. I feel that having their written down conversation notes that I recorded from each session and their drawings really grounded them in the text and their ideas about the text topic. Additionally, I could see exceptional growth from lesson to lesson on their drawings.

The Buffalo group was a little more challenging at times to keep motivated and enthused about coming to group. Sam and Kayla especially had been difficulty joining the group right away on a consistent basis. They often refused to come to group or acted at times like they did not hear me call their group. Then, I would go and quietly remind them that we were having group and tell them that they would have to do group either at group time or with me during recess. This helped motivate them to come to group, but when they got to group at times they refused to participate. In comparison, Layla and Dee consistently came to group and participated actively. This group did not struggle as much during partner sharing time and I did not need to give them sentence starters. This did not surprise me because everyone in the Buffalo group scored in the emergent range on his or her oral language assessments. However, I did have to check in at times to make sure the partners were staying on task and discussing the text. After the first two weeks the Buffalos got more used to the routines of the new strategies and were easier to motivate in group. Our discussions got deeper and more meaningful and Sam especially
added new insights or perspectives to the discussions. By the end of the four weeks Layla, Dee, and Sam were putting great detail into their drawings and sharing actively. Kayla did a much better job of participating in group and being engaged, but still refused at times to add new words or details to her drawings.

During the implementation of both strategies with my groups I was taking detailed notes on what they were sharing with their partners, my observations of their reading behavior, and collecting their drawings. After each lesson I made a copy of my students drawings to show growth and the progression of their thinking from lesson one to lesson three. For some students there was a huge difference between their lesson one drawings and their lesson three drawings. Overall, the drawings from the first few weeks varied in detail from my students’ drawings in week four. They got much more comfortable writing down their ideas and adding labels to their pictures. The detail in their pictures increased with the depth of their discussions and partner sharing. Examples of student drawings are included in appendix G and H.

Overall, I believe that the implementation of the two new oral language strategies went well and was received with open arms by the students. They greatly enjoyed all the added partner sharing and the opportunity to write and draw everyday about the text we were reading. I was impressed with how they pushed themselves and took pride in their progress. I saw all of my students make progress, even the students who started out the process very reluctantly and defiantly.

Post-Assessment Data & Analysis

After conducting my action research for four weeks with my two guided reading groups I re-administered all three assessments. I administered the assessments over a
three-day period, which is the same process I conducted with my pre-assessments. It took me two days to score the results. My overall impression from all three post-assessments determined a pattern of consistent growth in all areas for my students. I will go into greater detail and explain my observations and analysis of each assessment below.

The first post-assessment that I gave my students was the Mondo Bookshop Oral Language assessment. This assessment was done in the hallway outside my classroom to cut down on disruptions and allow me to hear everything each student was saying. In the table below I have included the participants oral language score out of 15 sentences. I also included how many sentences they increased or decreased compared to their pre-assessment oral language score. This is represented by using the + or – symbols in the chart underneath the post-assessment score.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Reading Group</th>
<th>Oral Language Score out of 15</th>
<th>Home Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Willie</td>
<td>Eagles</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Hmong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+3 sentences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connie</td>
<td>Eagles</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Hmong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+9 sentences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seng</td>
<td>Eagles</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>English &amp; Hmong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+5 sentences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonya</td>
<td>Eagles</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Karen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+7 sentences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td>Eagles</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>English &amp; Hmong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+5 sentences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Buffalos</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+2 sentences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kayla</td>
<td>Buffalos</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+3 sentences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layla</td>
<td>Buffalos</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+3 sentences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dee</td>
<td>Buffalos</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Hmong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+3 sentences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When analyzing my post-assessment data for the oral language assessment the first thing that I immediately noticed was that all of my students increased their scores by at least two or more sentences. All my students now have oral language scores between ten to 15, which means they are now all considered emergent or beginning in their oral language skills. I was very excited to see so much growth, especially in my student Connie who increased her oral language score by nine sentences and my other student Tonya who increased her oral language score by seven sentences. Both of these students entered my classroom extremely shy and reluctant to speak let alone share anything in group. Through this process I saw both of them gain significant confidence in their ideas and getting used to the idea that what they think they can say and what they say they can write. I believe that not only Connie and Tonya, but all nine students started to see themselves as meaning makers and investigators into new texts. They looked forward to sharing their ideas about the new book we were reading and enjoyed having me read their ideas that they had shared from previous lessons. The students would even sometimes compete to see who could share the most new or exciting ideas about the text. It was really enjoyable to see them so excited about reading and discussion.

The second post-assessment that I administered was the Mondo Bookshop benchmark text level assessment. This assessment has many pieces and was the way I wanted to measure their overall reading level compared to their other peers in first grade. Below is the post-assessment data. To show growth I used the + symbol underneath their post-assessment score to show how many reading levels they had improved. I also used the + and – symbols to show increases or decreases in reading fluency by words per minute.
Table 4.5 Mondo Bookshop Benchmark Text Level Post-Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Text Level (Zero to Z)</th>
<th>Fluency (words per minute)</th>
<th>Retell/Comprehension Questions (Out of Six)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Willie</td>
<td>Eagles</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+ 4 levels</td>
<td>+2 words</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connie</td>
<td>Eagles</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+3 levels</td>
<td>+23 words</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seng</td>
<td>Eagles</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+1 level</td>
<td>-10 words</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonya</td>
<td>Eagles</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+4 levels</td>
<td>+4 words</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td>Eagles</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+2 levels</td>
<td>-3 words</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Buffalos</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+3 levels</td>
<td>+4 words</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kayla</td>
<td>Buffalos</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+3 levels</td>
<td>+15 words</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layla</td>
<td>Buffalos</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+3 levels</td>
<td>+7 words</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dee</td>
<td>Buffalos</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+3 levels</td>
<td>+30 words</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After administering this post-assessment I was pleased to see that all of my students increased their reading levels between one to four levels. Their fluency scores were a little more unpredictable, but reading fluency was not my main focus. I think that in the future fluency needs to be something I focus on more especially with my struggling readers. I was also impressed with my students’ abilities to retell and answer the comprehension questions about the text. In the pre-assessment there were five students who could read the text easily, but could not retell it or answer the comprehension questions correctly. This time all of my students did an excellent job retelling and answering the comprehension questions. Not one of them was held back from going up a text level due to their comprehension. I think this can be attributed to my focus on
retelling in the STaR strategy and our focus on discussion and answering higher-level questions in the Talking, Drawing, Writing strategy.

However, I am concerned about Seng’s progress in reading. He is still only reading at a level B and struggled greatly to decode and recognize many of the first twenty sight words that we had been focusing on in reading group all year long. Because of this factor, it took him twice as long to read his book and his fluency score went down ten words. I have completed two eight-week reading interventions for him and he also has done two eight-week interventions with the speech pathologist that works with first graders at our school. All of these interventions are documented and will be evaluated when he moves on to second grade. I saw him making great progress in his oral language skills, but unlike the others participants in my study was not transferring this progress over to his reading skills.

Overall, I was very pleased and excited with my students’ progress in increasing their reading text levels. I think this helps correlate the importance of oral language skills with overall reading success, especially in students who are classified as struggling readers. By giving my students the access and exposure to higher level discussion and talk they were able to take on harder text structures with confidence and determination. They also started to push themselves as writers and get used to not only expressing their ideas orally, but putting them down on paper for others to read.

The third and final post-assessment I administered was the story-retelling portion of the OLAI2. I was the most excited and nervous about these results because this assessment was new to me and I had never given it to my students before this action research project. I was not sure how much growth my students would make, especially
since all of them had struggled with the assessment the first time around. It was a new concept to them to retell a story that they had heard while only hearing the words and not seeing any text. Below are my post-assessment results. I also used the + and – symbols to indicate the increase or decrease in words and percentage of words retold.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Story</th>
<th>Words Retold</th>
<th>Percentage of Words Retold</th>
<th>Story Elements Named</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Willie</td>
<td>Popcorn &amp; Mary</td>
<td>20 words</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>3 elements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-1 word</td>
<td>-1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connie</td>
<td>Mario &amp; Miguel</td>
<td>44 words</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>3 elements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seng</td>
<td>Mario &amp; Miguel</td>
<td>30 words</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>3 elements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+14 words</td>
<td>+9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonya</td>
<td>Popcorn &amp; Mary</td>
<td>30 words</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>3 elements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+12 words</td>
<td>+7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td>Popcorn &amp; Mary</td>
<td>28 words</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>3 elements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+11 words</td>
<td>+7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Popcorn &amp; Mary</td>
<td>59 words</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>3 elements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+49 words</td>
<td>+29%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kayla</td>
<td>Mario &amp; Miguel</td>
<td>44 words</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>4 elements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+5 words</td>
<td>+4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layla</td>
<td>Mario &amp; Miguel</td>
<td>46 words</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>3 elements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+30 words</td>
<td>+17%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dee</td>
<td>Mario &amp; Miguel</td>
<td>38 words</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>3 elements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+27 words</td>
<td>+18%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fortunately, I was blown away by the progress of my students on the oral retelling assessment. Eight of the nine students increased their percentage of words retold by 4% or more. Connie and Layla increased their words retold by 17%. Dee increased her words retold by 18% and Sam increased his words retold by 29%. All four of these students were reluctant to speak or share their ideas at the beginning of the research process, but by the end I almost had to interrupt them while they were sharing so we could continue with other activities in group. I knew that all of my students had
improved their retelling skills because it was a huge part of our weekly lessons, but I was not expecting so much growth. I really liked the OLAI2 retelling assessment and I think that I will continue to use it with my students in future groups, especially students who have oral language needs or concerns. All of my nine students are still considered in stage I (least experienced) in their oral retelling, but they still made good growth overall and progressed toward being in stage II (basic).

However, in examining my results, I was also surprised that Willie went down a percentage point in words retold. He is a leader in my Eagles group and always one of the first students to volunteer to share his ideas or retell what we have just read. He does have the lowest oral language score of all nine students, 10 sentences out of 15. I think that this may have affected his ability to retell because some of the language structures were too complicated in the text that I read to him. The text structures may have been too complex for him to fully take in and comprehend in his stage of oral English language development.

In analyzing this data, I also believe this assessment was a good reminder that as educators we sometimes work with students everyday and assume they have mastered a skill or are proficient when really they are missing specific pieces in their learning that are keeping them from fully understanding or grasping the material being taught. This is why having solid data to guide and drive instruction is so important to reaching every student and giving every student the kind of differentiated instruction that they need.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I presented my research results from implementing my two oral language strategies for four weeks with nine of my first grade struggling readers. I
administered three assessments; the Mondo Bookshop oral language assessment, Mondo Bookshop benchmark text level assessment, and the retelling portion of the OLAI2. These assessments were given before the start of my research and after my research had concluded. The data from these assessments was used to help me answer the question: 

*How can implementing oral language strategies support first grade struggling readers?*

In Chapter Five, I will look closely at my research question and how my action research helped me answer my capstone question or not answer this question. I will also look at what I learned from my research, how it will affect my future literacy instruction, what I will change to make my strategies more effective. Lastly, I will explore how this research and writing process will help push me as a learner not just in my classroom, but outside my classroom. How can I take what I have learned and share it with other educators in my school, my district or in the larger urban area? How will this process shape my future career as an educator and where I go next professionally as I push myself to continue to be a lifelong learner?
CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusions

Introduction

One of my biggest challenges as a first grade teacher over the past seven years has been finding a way to reach all of my students’ literacy needs. In first grade, students are expected to make huge gains, especially in the area of reading. As a classroom teacher, I am tasked with the extremely important job of developing the early literacy lives of my students and teaching them the mechanics of reading, but also instilling in them a joy and love for reading. This is an area of my instruction that I have felt inadequate in for many years, especially with my students who were struggling readers. Many of these struggling readers also encountered difficulties with their English oral language, which made me want to research and know more not just about struggling readers, but also how oral language plays a role in reading development. My passion for young readers and my interest in oral language development lead me to ask the research question: How can implementing oral language strategies support first grade struggling readers?

In Chapter Five I will reflect on my action research project and how the results supported or changed my question. I will also discuss what new knowledge I came across because of my research and the implications this new learning will have in my classroom in the future. Additionally, I will also discuss how I will use what I have learned to expand my role as an educator and leader outside my classroom apart from my
daily role as a classroom teacher. Finally, I will conclude with what research I would like to pursue in the future.

My Research Question

The goal of my whole action research and my capstone was to identify effective oral language strategies that I could use in my first grade classroom to support my struggling readers. As I mentioned earlier, I have noticed that over the years many, if not all, of my struggling readers’ also struggle at some level with their oral English language. I have seen this theme in both my native English speaking students and my students who speak another language other than English at home. This noticing motivated me two years ago to improve my oral language instruction and build a repertoire of best practice oral language strategies to use with my first grade class. Using best practice strategies like think, pair, share, sentence frames, naming words on our fingers or asking higher level questions with more than just one word answers helped my students build their confidence in their language immensely. However, I was still seeing a gap in their reading scores compared to their more language proficient peers.

To end this gap I decided to pick two best practice strategies (Talking, Drawing, Writing strategy and STaR strategy) that I had not yet implemented and really dig deep into the results using three different assessment data points. By zooming in and focusing on two of my reading groups I was able to observe from week to week what was making an impact and what was not. I also was able to collect work samples and data to show each student’s progression over the four-week research study. After the four-week period ended I was able to compare their pre-assessment and post-assessment scores. As a teacher researcher I was pleasantly surprised to see that all of my students made growth,
not just in their oral English language skills, but also in their overall reading text level. To me, this demonstrated that oral language strategies are an extremely important part of literacy instruction, especially literacy instruction for struggling readers. I know that I will continue to use these two strategies in my guided reading groups and also continue to push myself to find other oral language strategies that can support whole group instruction as well.

Implications for Future Instruction

Both of the strategies that I choose for my action research had elements of discussion, higher level questioning, drawing, labeling, writing, and retelling. In my reading instruction in the past I felt that I incorporated a lot of discussion in whole groups, small groups, and partnerships. I also feel that I did a good job of pushing students to answer higher-level questions and not just allow them to answer with one word. These practices helped greatly with improving my students’ confidence in sharing their ideas and making meaning from what they were hearing and reading.

Unfortunately, I realized through this process that I was missing two crucial pieces in their oral language and reading development, writing and retelling. I would often have writing or responding to the text planned in my guided reading lesson, but most of the time this would get eliminated due to time. I saw through this process that writing and drawing were often one of my students favorite parts of the lesson and they got much more out of doing those activities than having me try to guide them through a sight word or comprehension activity. In the future, I will make drawing and writing a daily part of all my guided reading groups right away in the beginning of the year. I think that incorporating this writing and drawing component earlier in the school year
will give them ownership of their learning and help them see themselves as meaning makers more quickly. It also is a great way to support students who are more hesitant to share orally, but have amazing ideas locked in their brains waiting to be shared.

The other very important component that I want to work on incorporating more into my literacy instruction is retelling. I want to work on having my students, not just retell stories they read or have read to them, but also practice retelling stories from picture cards or wordless books. By practicing retelling with picture support it will help ground students in the idea of story sequence and what the main important events are in a text. As students get more comfortable with retelling I want to have them work on using the five finger retell where they share what happened in the beginning, middle, and end, the problem and solution, and the setting and characters. Retelling is an important skill for students to have that helps improve their comprehension of the story and also is a great way to have them practice their oral English language skills.

Research Limitations

When I reflect upon my action research I am very proud and think that overall it went extremely well and helped deepen my understanding of reading instruction for struggling readers. I believe that the research I did for this capstone will have positive effects not only on my instruction in literacy, but my overall teaching practice. When I think about what I would like to change about my research only one thing pops into my head, time. I was only able to conduct my research with my students for four weeks because I was waiting for approval for my research. Initially I wanted to conduct my action research in my two guided reading groups for six to eight weeks to give me a larger window of time for implementation and data collection. Ideally, it would have also
been better to not conduct my research the last four weeks of the school year. The last month of school is very busy and chaotic because of end of the year events and activities, field trips, and final assessments. At times, this caused unpredictable schedules that interfered with regular guided reading instructional time. I was able to complete all my groups each week, but at times I had to adjust and meet with my groups at different times of the day or different days all together. However, it worked out and I was still able to see the positive results from implementing my two oral language strategies.

Future Research and Professional Implications

This action research and capstone process has showed me that as an educator no problem is too big as long as you are willing to put the time into researching a solution for your students. I also realized that educational research in some ways is endless and that you need a clearly defined focus to stay on track. This was a difficult challenge for me because I found so many interesting, but off topic research articles and books that I wanted to spend more time reading. In the future I would like to research more closely the differences and similarities between the oral language development of native English speaking students and students who speak a language other than English at home. How does this effect instruction and what are the needs of both groups? I would also like to look more closely at how living in poverty can affect oral language and reading development, with a focus on primary students. Lastly, I would like to research more in general about oral language development in children and the process of how language is acquired.

When I look to the future and the completion of my action research and capstone, I find myself asking, “what now or what’s the next step?” When I think about all of the
time and energy that I put into this project I feel a sense of great accomplishment, but I also feel a large responsibility to share the knowledge I learn to help other educators. Looking back, I wish someone had stepped in and helped me with my literacy instruction the first few years I was an educator. I feel extremely fortunate to have worked with amazing colleagues and mentors who helped me become a stronger literacy teacher over the years. However, I know not every one gets the same support when they are in their first few years of teaching. Looking ahead, I would like to develop a professional development workshop on how classroom teachers can incorporate oral language strategies into their whole group and small group literacy instruction. I would also like to share my format and templates for how I recorded data and took notes on a daily basis in my reading groups for both guided reading lessons and oral language lessons. I know that the school that I work at has a lot of students who speak a language other than English at home and sometimes our teachers are not fully prepared to offer all the language opportunities our students crave and need. As a result, I want to take what I have learned and share it so it can impact the success of my fellow teachers and help build the confidence in their students to know that their voice is important and their ideas need to be heard!

Conclusion

My passion and love of teaching reading lead me to want to learn more about literacy education and the power it has to change lives. My desire to make myself a better teacher, especially of struggling readers, pushed me to ask the question: How can implementing oral language strategies support first grade struggling readers? Through this research I learned that there is no magical trick or strategy that can help every student
learn to read. Being a good reading teacher is possible only when you get to know each student individually and can identify his or her unique literacy needs. When you know your students’ strengths and weaknesses you can create a plan to fill in those gaps and highlight those areas where they need extra support. Through this process, I uncovered two extremely valuable oral language strategies that I will continue to use in my first grade reading instruction, but more importantly I have realized that as the teacher, I have the power to continue to change and evolve with my students. I do not need to find two good strategies and teach them forever. Ideally, I can constantly be looking and researching the newest information and strategies to become a life long learner of literacy right alongside my amazing and talented first grade students!
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Allington, R. L. (2002). What I’ve learned about effective reading instruction from a


Appendix A

Adapted Jan Richardson Guided Reading Lesson Plan
## Guided Reading Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students:</th>
<th>Date:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eagles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Activity Options* | Observations/Notes

#### Working with Letters

**Letter Activity (choose one):**

- [ ] Name a word that begins with that letter
- [ ] Name a letter that begins a word
- [ ] Find the letter that makes the sound

**Letter Formation:**

#### Sight Words:

#### Text Questions: | Student Responses:

#### Working with Books

(Shared reading with level A book; encourage oral language & teach Concepts about Print)

**Title:**

Choose one or two:

- [ ] Concept of a word (frame word or count words in a sentence)
- [ ] Concept of a letter (frame a letter or count letters in a word)
- [ ] Identify first letter/word
- [ ] Identify last letter/word
- [ ] Identify period
- [ ] Identify capital/lowercase letters
- [ ] One to one matching

### Interactive Writing and Cut-up Sentence

Adapted from: Richardson, J. (2009). *The next step in guided reading: focused assessments and targeted lessons for helping every student become a better reader.* New York, New York: Scholastic
Appendix B

Blank Oral Language Lesson Plan Template
Oral Lang. Topic:___________ Group:_______ Date:_______

New Vocabulary
Words:____________________________________________________

____________________________________________________

Sessions 1 & 2:

Student 1:

Student 2:

Student 3:

Student 4:

Student 5:
Appendix C

OLAI 2 Retelling Assessment & Mondo Bookshop Oral Language and Text Level Assessments
OLAI 2 Story Retelling Assessment
Popcorn and Mary

Story Retelling

Directions
Use the Popcorn and Mary picture cards. You may also use the Mario and Luigi’s Messy Room story or give the child a choice. Say: I’m going to show you some pictures and read a story to you. Listen carefully, because when I finish reading, I will give you the pictures and ask you to tell me the same story. Ready?

If you offer a choice of stories, show the child the first picture from each story and say:

Here are pictures from two different stories. Which story would you like me to read to you?

Arrange the grade-appropriate picture cards in numbered sequence. As you read each portion of the story, place the corresponding picture card in front of the child, forming a single line, left-to-right.

When you are finished reading the story, say:

Now it’s your turn to tell me the story. Try to use the same words I said, so it sounds like a story in a book.

Stack the cards in sequence with the lowest number face up on top and place them in front of the child.

Recall the child’s story retelling for audio playback during scoring.

Scoring
During audio playback, circle the words the child correctly uses in his or her retelling. Mark synonyms, contractions, and other words that convey the same content with only a slight variation as correct.

Under Learning Behavior on page 6, note any behaviors that contribute to or interfere with the child’s performance in this section. Then, place a check mark next to the rating that best describes the result.

Word Count
On page 6, divide the number of circled words in the story retell by the total number of words in the story and multiply by 100 to obtain a “percentage correct” score. Round percentages up to the nearest whole number.

Story Elements
On page 6, score one point for each element included in the child’s retelling:

- Setting—the initial context of the story, e.g., Popcorn and Mary; a pony/horse named Popcorn.
- Character—name or description of all the main character(s), e.g., Mary’s sister, Popcorn’s pony/horse.
- Problem—events that affect the character(s) actions or feelings, e.g., Mary was afraid to ride.
- Resolution to the problem—events that solve the problem, e.g., Mary was brave, tried to ride Popcorn, did not fall.

Grades K–3 Story

Card 1:
Once, there was a pony named Popcorn. He was called Popcorn because of all the tiny gray spots on his back. Popcorn was special because he could talk, but his friend Mary was the only one who knew it.

Card 2:
The two played every day. Popcorn loved to roll and kick his feet high in the air. When he did this, Mary laughed and laughed. Each day, Popcorn asked to give Mary a ride, but Mary was afraid.

Card 3:
When Mary was brave. She went to get her saddle, hard hat, and boots. Mary said, “Popcorn, I’ll try. I can be brave!” Popcorn said, “Don’t worry, Mary. You won’t fall!”

Card 4:
So, Mary hopped on Popcorn’s back. They went trotting across the field. A little bird and a funny little rabbit watched. Popcorn said, “You are so brave, Mary! You can do it!” And she did it and she did not fall. After that, Mary was never afraid again. She and Popcorn had many fun and exciting days together.

Popcorn and Mary

Card 1:
Once, there was a pony named Popcorn. He had tiny gray spots on his back. They looked just like popcorn. Popcorn was a very special pony. He could talk. His friend Mary was the only one who knew it.

Card 2:
Popcorn and Mary played every day and Popcorn loved it. He especially loved to roll and then kick high in the air. This made Mary laugh and laugh. Each day, Popcorn asked to give Mary a ride, but Mary was afraid.

Card 3:
(Skip Card 3.)

Card 4:
Then, one day, Mary felt brave. She got her saddle, helmet, and boots. She said, “Popcorn, I’ll try, I can be brave!” Popcorn said, “Don’t worry, Mary. You won’t fall.”

- s -

OLAI 2 Story Retelling Assessment
Mario and Miguel’s Messy Room

Story Retelling (Alternate Story)

MARIO AND MIGUEL’S MESSY ROOM

Card 1:
It is Saturday morning. Mario and Miguel get up early because they are excited to go play.

Card 2:
Mom walks into their room. She looks around. "Oh no, this room is a mess!" she says. Mom tells them, "First, we will eat breakfast. Then, before you go outside, you are going to clean this room. Mario, you’ll pick up all the clothes and put them in the clothes basket. Miguel, you will pick up the toys and put them in the toy box. I will make your beds."

Card 4:
After breakfast, the boys get back to work. When mom finishes making the beds, she sees that everything is where it belongs. "Wow! You did a great job! Your room is ship-shape condition, so now you can go play."

PreK Story Retelling Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story Elements Score:</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

POPCORN AND MARY

| Word Count Score: | 123 |
| Total Words: | 100 |
| Correct: | |

MARIO AND MIGUEL’S MESSY ROOM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story Elements Score:</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| Word Count Score: | 154 |
| Total Words: | 100 |
| Correct: | |

Learning Behavior

- **FLEXIBLE** The child interacts positively with the examiner and task.
- **FIGHT** The child confronts or resists the examiner or task.
- **FLIGHT** The child shuts down, appeals, and appears immobilized.

| Name: ______________________________ | Date: ____________________________ | Grade: ________________________ |

**SET 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The puppy’s tail is curly.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mommy is baking a cake.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The teacher told them a story.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>There are the children.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>She’s eating her lunch slowly.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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**SET 2**

<table>
<thead>
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<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>That red bike over there used to be my uncle’s.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The girl in the car is waving her hand.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Over the weekend Jane brought us some cookies.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Here comes the machine that digs the big holes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The bird built a nest high in the tree.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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**SET 3**

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<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Be ready to come inside when the bell rings.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The car and the truck were carrying some large boxes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The brave fireman showed our class the big red truck.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>There go the men who clean the playground at our school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>My friend likes to eat ice cream when it’s very hot out.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL SCORE**

---

## K-2 Reading Record: Level B

### Example: Level B Running Record Assessment

Mondo Bookshop Benchmark Text Level Assessment

Example: Level B Comprehension Questions

Appendix D

List of Mondo Bookshop Books Used in Guided Reading Lessons
### Mondo Bookshop Texts Used in Guided Reading Lessons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text Titles</th>
<th>Text Picture</th>
<th>Text Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td><em>A World of Birds</em> by</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="A World of Birds" /></td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sylvia M. James</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>How Many Legs</em> by</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="How Many Legs" /></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norman Platnick</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Animals Sleeping</em></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Animals Sleeping" /></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Amy Levin &amp; Jenny Halket</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Grade</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Firefighters</em></td>
<td><em>by Nancy Leber</em></td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Where Animals Live?</em></td>
<td><em>by Linette Ellis Matthewson</em></td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Wow!</em></td>
<td><em>by James Hutt</em></td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix E

Sample of Three Day Lesson Plans from Eagles Reading Group
Eagles Lesson Plan Week #1

A World of Bird

Oral Lang. Topic: ______ Group: Eagles Date: ______

New Vocabulary Words: beak, peacock, swan, nest

Sessions 1 & 2:

O Birds can swim. Birds can hide. Birds can have a big neck. Birds can drink water.

R Birds can eat fish. Birds have beaks. Birds have eggs.


S Flamingos have long legs. Birds have nests.

T Flamingos have long necks. Flamingos can drink water. Birds can have long legs.
Eagles Lesson Plan Week #4

Oral Lang. Topic: Animal Homes Group: Eagles Date: Week #4

New Vocabulary Words: pond, ground

Sessions 1 & 2:


S: Turtles live in water. Fish live in pond. Crabs live in water.

T: Owls live in the tree. Snake live in the ground. Turtles live in the water.

---

### Guided Reading Plan

**Students:** Eagles

**Date:** Week #4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity Options*</th>
<th>Observations/Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Working with Letters</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter Activity (choose one):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Name a word that begins with that letter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Name a letter that begins a word</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Find the letter that makes the sound</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter Formation:</td>
<td>T, V, X, C, E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sight Words:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>this, live</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>do, live, this, tree, in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Text Questions:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| *How do animals choose their homes?* | *I want to live in a tree because it help me to see,*
| *What do you want to learn more about?* | *I like to live in the ground because I can see worms,*
|   | *I want to live in a tree has because you can play up there.* |
| **Working with Books** (Shared reading with level A book; encourage oral language & teach Concepts about Print) | |
| *Title:* Where Animals Live? | |
| Choose one or two: | |
|  □ Concept of a word (frame word or count words in a sentence) | (D) |
|  □ Concept of a letter (frame a letter or count letters in a word) |
|  □ Identify first letter/word |
|  □ Identify last letter/word |
|  □ Identify period |
|  □ Identify capital/lowercase letters |
|  □ One to one matching |
| **Interactive Writing and Cut-up Sentence** | |
| I learned... | |

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Appendix F

Sample of Three Day Lesson Plans from Buffalos Reading Group
Buffalos Lesson Plan Week #1

Oral Lang. Topic: Sleeping Group: Buffaloes Date: ___

New Vocabulary Words: swan, koala, cave, jungle

Sessions 1& 2:

L Bunnies sleep in the hole. The crocodile is sleeping in the water. Birds sleep in the nest. Snakes sleeping in the grass.

D Wolves sleep in the snow. A fox sleep in the grass. Swans sleep in the water. Cheetahs sleep in the grass. Animals can sleep in trees.

K The birds are sleeping in the nest. The horse is sleeping in the farm. Bats can sleep in the tree and birds can sleep in nests.

S Refused to share because he said everyone else took his ideas. Polar bears sleep with their babies to keep them safe and warm.
Buffalos Lesson Plan Week #4

Oral Lang. Topic: **Wow!**  Group: **Buffaloes**  Date: **Week #4**

New Vocabulary Words: ____________________________

Sessions 1 & 2:

**L** Alligators can swim. Horse help people who want to go in the water because they have big legs. Kitties can scratch. Puppies can dig holes in the dirt.

**D** Dolphins can swim. Horse run fast. Cows give you milk and alligators have sharp teeth.

**K** Dogs can dig. Kangaroos can hop and penguins can slide. Kittens can scratch people and lila. Monkeys can climb trees and birds can fly. People can slide like penguins.

**S** Horses can run. Dolphins can jump in the water. Birds can fly. Kangaroos can jump so high. Dogs dig in grass and mud. Dogs play a lot with people.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guided Reading Plan</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students:</strong> Buffalos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activity Options</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Working with Letters</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter Activity (choose one):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Name a word that begins with that letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Name a letter that begins a word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Find the letter that makes the sound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sight Words:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Come)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>me*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>can*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>look*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Text Questions:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>What is the problem?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>How was it solved?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>What adventures would you like to go on? Why?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Working with Books</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title: Wow (D)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choose one or two:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Concept of a word (frame word or count words in a sentence)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Concept of a letter (frame a letter or count letters in a word)</td>
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<tr>
<td>□ Identify first letter/word</td>
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<td>□ Identify period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Identify capital/lowercase letters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ One-to-one matching</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Interactive Writing and Cut-up Sentence</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look at me</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Appendix G

Connie’s Drawings from Talking, Drawing, Writing Strategy
Connie's Drawings Week #1

BIRDS

BIRDS CAN SWIM

Week #1
Lesson #1
Birds can swim
Birds can swim.

Tree

See this bird; it is a peacock.

Week #1
Lesson #3

Birds - Birds
Connie's Drawings Week #4

Week #4
Lesson #1

Firefighters
C

The firefighters put on some gear and go. They are going to help and cool it. Water comes out of a hose. The firefighters help the people.
Firefighters

Week #4
Lesson #2

The firefighters put on boots and go into the water to put out fires and make things help the town.
The alarm was ringing. Put on the firefighter's boots, aer, and waking up coats down. They put on hats and gloves.

Week #4

Lesson #2
Week #4
Lesson #3

Firefighters

The firemen, Pat, Nagal, and C., are going to the firehouse.
They are going to take water from the hydrant and put it in the fire engines.

We're going to the firehouse.

Sun, clouds, house, fireman, hydrant.
Appendix H

Sam’s Drawings from Talking, Drawing, Writing Strategy
Sam’s Drawings Week #1

SLEEPING ANIMALS

Week #1
Lesson #1
bats
Week #1
Lesson #3

bats
Sam’s Drawings Week #4

Week #4
Lesson #1

Wow
5
Week #4
Lesson #2

Dogs
Dogs
big in the
mountains

Wow
Appendix I

Transcript of Connie and Sam’s OLAI 2 Story Retelling Pre and Post Assessments
Connie’s OLAI 2 Story Retelling Pre-Assessment Transcript:

Story:  *Mario and Miguel’s Messy Room*

**Connie:**

*The boy is like to go outside and her room is mess.*

*It not clean.*

*Their mom said clean out your room.*

*You go outside and play.*

*They clean their and their clothes and their bed.*

*They finish all they room and the mom said you finish.*

**Word Total:** 47

**Percentage Retold:** 12%
Connie’s OLAI 2 Story Retelling Post-Assessment Transcript:

**Story: Mario and Miguel’s Messy Room**

**Connie:**

They excited to go outside.

Two children their mom said go eat your breakfast then go to your room then go outside.

They clean their room.

Mom told the children nice job to clean your room.

Their mom let them go outside and play.

**Word Total: 45**

**Percentage Retold: 29%**
Sam’s OLAI 2 Story Retelling Pre-Assessment Transcript:

Story: *Popcorn and Mary*

*Sam:*

*The horse and the dumb old girl.*

*He kicking his legs as high as he can.*

*The girl laughed.*

Word Total: 19

Percentage Retold: 6%
Story: *Popcorn and Mary*

_Sam:_

So Mary and Popcorn that’s why he had all the little spots all over his back and Mary was the only one who knew he was talking.

He kicked his feet high in the sky and they had fun together.

She said I am not afraid anymore.

I can do this.

Popcorn said it is okay you won’t fall.

One day Mary and Popcorn.

Mary wans’t afraid to get on Popcorn’s back and the little bird watched them do it.

Word Total: 80

Percentage Retold: 35%