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A note from the editors of the Literacy Teaching and Learning Journal, the official journal of the Kentucky Reading Association.

This first edition of the LTL Journal begins a new era of more frequent publications full of a wealth of interesting and informative information in the field of literacy. The journal title is new, the editors are new to the position, and the format is new.

We would like to thank Dr. Kimberlee Sharp, an editor of Social Studies Teaching and Learning. Dr. Sharp provided technical assistance and advice on the new format of the journal as well as peer editor rubrics. This edition of the journal includes research articles, a professional book review, and some teacher tips. The editors are already in search of submissions for the next journal publication. Anyone interested in submitting articles, please contact acritchfield64@gmail.com.

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A Review of Comprehensive Literacy for All: Teaching Students with Significant Disabilities to Read and Write

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Historically, teaching individuals with severe disabilities reading and writing skills was often limited to functional skills like recognizing/understanding functional signs (e.g., stop sign, exit sign, etc.). There was little emphasis on teaching the type of academic reading and writing skills their peers without disabilities were learning. Karen A. Erickson and David A. Koppenhaver have long advocated teaching comprehensive literacy skills (both reading and writing) to individuals with severe disabilities. The authors have compiled information from both research and their 25 years of experience teaching those with the most significant disabilities to read and write. This textbook provides teachers and parents with a guide to improve the reading and writing skills of their children/students with severe disabilities. They emphasize teaching reading and writing skills similar to those taught to children without disabilities, rather than teaching "functional reading" and "functional writing" skills.

Layout of the text

The 241-page soft-cover textbook is comprised of four sections—the first section is core understandings, the second section is building a foundation of literacy, the third section is learning to read and write, and the fourth section is implementation. Each section will be discussed below.

Section I, Core Understandings (Chapters 1-2), emphasizes emergent literacy. Emergent literacy skills are those skills related to reading and writing before the child is formally taught how to read and write (e.g., handling a book, looking at the title and pictures, recognizing letters, etc.). The authors focus on emergent literacy activities such as shared reading and shared writing, alphabet knowledge and phonological awareness, to independent reading and independent writing. These foundational skills represent the steps in learning to communicate symbolically and read and write independently.

Section II, Building a Foundation for Literacy (Chapters 3-5), includes emphases that must be combined to offer comprehensive emergent literacy instruction via shared and independent reading, writing, and alphabetic and phonological awareness. In these chapters, the authors provide suggestions for embedded alphabet instruction and embedded phonological awareness instruction. Providing instruction within activities is an effective way to teach skills in context, rather than in isolation. This allows individuals with severe disabilities to see how and when to use the taught skills in real-life situations. Additionally, the authors provide tips for encouraging emergent reading and writing skills.

Section III, Learning to Read and Write (Chapters 6-10), emphasizes conventional reading and writing instruction. First, a framework is provided to organize instruction and then describe specific strategies to teach reading comprehension, self-directed reading, writing, and word identification (including decoding and spelling). Also included are chapters on reading comprehension and vocabulary instruction, with a focus on teaching meaning. Additionally, the

authors have included a chapter on writing, including examples of strategies to improve handwriting, word choice, and editing. Decoding, word identification, and spelling are the foci of the next chapter.

Section IV, Implementation (Chapters 11-12) addresses a range of topics that must be considered when planning and delivering comprehensive emergent or conventional literacy instruction to children with significant disabilities. One important aspect of teaching students with significant disabilities is the use of assistive technology (AT). The authors provide information about how to use AT to support communication (both augmentative and alternative), access to materials and productivity, and to support access to both reading and writing. In the final chapter, the authors provide suggestions on organizing and delivering effective instruction. Tips include how to determine if the students are likely to benefit from a comprehensive literacy program or conventional literacy instruction, how to deliver comprehensive literacy instruction, planning for a group, and scheduling time to teach. The authors also provide insight into how to provide comprehensive instruction across settings, as students with significant disabilities may be served in various settings. In the final chapter, the authors provide common questions teachers have when implementing comprehensive literacy instruction. The answers to these questions may enhance the performance of the teachers teaching comprehensive literacy and, in turn, enhance the literacy skills of their students.

Features

Each chapter begins with a "Research Brief" that summarizes the research on the particular topic in that chapter (e.g., emergent writers). Following that research review, the authors provide practical research-validated suggestions for teaching the skill that is the focus topic for the chapter. In addition, each chapter ends with recommended readings and resources. Additionally, this text includes sample teaching scenarios and dialogues, how-to strategies, and downloadable resources, including sample lessons, a quick guide to key literacy terms, lesson sequences, and flowcharts to guide instruction.

Conclusion

Overall, Drs. Erickson and Koppenhaver have written a textbook that serves an important function—to teach adults (teachers and parents) how to enhance the comprehensive literacy skills of those students with the most significant disabilities. Utilizing the information from this text, one has the opportunity to develop effective comprehensive literacy instruction for a group of students often denied that opportunity.

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Blending In: Responding to Pandemic Learning Challenges with Targeted Phonemic Awareness Instruction

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Following the academic disruption caused by Covid-19, many students lacked skills that they typically would have mastered in "normal" academic years. Observations and assessment data indicated that a large proportion of students were unable to blend sounds to form words, yet they knew and could produce the individual letter sounds. Preservice teachers met student needs with an array of strategies they learned in their coursework, focusing on phoneme blending. Strategies shared here were effective in building toward phoneme blending in one-on-one settings in K-3 classrooms following the pandemic disruption. This writing is meant as a resource for educators interested in building students' phoneme blending skills.

During the 2020-2021 academic year, many preservice teachers were unable to visit schools. So, when we reentered schools in the fall of 2021, future teachers were finally able to work with developing readers to practice skills and strategies for their future profession. As part of their coursework, preservice teachers conducted literacy assessments on students to learn the process of administration, analysis, and planning for instruction to fit student needs. Specific student data is not shared in this article—rather an often-observed pattern is discussed, and intervention strategies are shared.

Contrary to past years, a new and troubling pattern emerged among the students we assessed. After administering Letter-Sound Assessments, Phonemic Awareness Assessments, and a Comprehensive Phonics Survey (Blevins, 2017) to K-5 students in cooperating schools, we discovered that many students knew and could produce their letter sounds but were unable to blend the related sounds together to form words. The ability to blend sounds together orally to make a word is one of the dimensions of phonemic awareness (Blevins, 2017; Yopp, 2005), and is a critical skill for word reading to flourish. It is typical for children to learn to identify, isolate, blend, and segment phonemes in simple words while in kindergarten and first grade (Birsch & Carreker, 2018). However, in our assessments of kindergarten, first, second, and even third-grade students, the prevalent trend among many students was this inability to blend speech sounds to form words. Based on those results, preservice teachers used strategies learned within their literacy coursework to build skills in blending phonemes with students in one-on-one settings. Commercial programs are not included here because they were not discussed and shared within the coursework. Preservice teachers used explicit and focused phonemic awareness instruction within individual lessons (Adams et al., 1998; Birsch & Carreker, 2018; Blackman et al., 2000; Blevins, 2017). In the next section, several of the strategies used to build students' skills toward phoneme blending will be shared.

Start with sound

A phoneme is the smallest unit of sound in a language. Before students blend letter sounds to produce words, they need opportunities to blend sounds together orally and use manipulatives

such as blocks, buttons, and pennies to represent each distinct sound (Birsch & Carreker, 2018). Readers must learn to blend sounds before they can take a letter, associate a sound, and then blend the sounds of those letters together.

When teaching students to blend sounds, it is best to use words that begin with continuous sounds (Birsch & Carreker, 2018; Blevins, 2017), such as *f, l, m, n, r, s, v, z*; "sounds that can be stretched without distortion" (Blevins, 2017, p. 69). By using these sounds first, a teacher can model moving from one sound to the next more easily (think *sit* instead of *bit*). Continuous sounds are easier to blend than stop sounds such as *d, p, and k* because they allow the reader to "slide into the vowel sound" in the case of a CVC word (Birsch & Carreker, 2018, p. 353). After students have demonstrated the ability to blend with continuant initial sounds, the teacher can proceed to using blending with initial stop sounds.

Listening to Sequences of Sounds

First, it may be necessary to help students build their listening capacity or their working memory of sounds. If children can't remember the sounds they have heard, they will certainly not be able to blend them. If memory seems to be an issue with your students, try building their capacity to listen to sequences of sounds (Adams et al., 1998). You will need various "noise makers" such as a bell for ringing, crumpling paper, knocking on a door, snapping fingers, clapping, sharpening a pencil, etc. Without letting students see what you are doing, make two sounds one after the other and ask the student to tell you which sounds they heard and in the correct order. When the student can remember two sounds, then build that capacity by asking for three sounds. It is important that you allow each student to participate- not to have callouts so you can be sure the students who need the skill are learning it.

Blending Phonemes

Once students can retain the memory of the sounds they hear, you can build their skills in blending phonemes. For many of these, students will need recognizable picture cards. Florida Center for Reading Research has many options for such cards, but there are no specific cards that are required. It is suggested that students are told what the pictures depict before beginning any of these games to limit confusion (Adams et al., 1998). Another helpful resource is a puppet with a mouth that can open and close. I recommend Sockrider Puppets, available on Etsy at https://www.etsy.com/shop/SockriderPuppets. These are created by a Kentucky teacher.

This sock puppet is great for phonemic awareness tasks because you can open and close his mouth as you say sounds with students. Available from Sockrider Puppets. Credit: etsy.com/shop/sockriderpuppets

Picky Puppet. Students are given picture cards and told what the pictures are. They can be on lanyards or held in students' hands. You need a puppet with a moveable mouth for this game. Your puppet, Picky Puppet, only likes things whose names begin with the sound it chooses. The puppet looks around the room at the students' pictures and does the following.

Puppet: I like marshmallows!

Students hold up pictures that start with the same first sound as marshmallows.

Puppet: I see a mop. Mmm—ooo—p… mop! Mop begins with /m/ just like mmmmarshmallows! Continue the game by having the puppet say other words that begin with sounds that match the words the other students are holding (Blevins, 2017).

Fix It. Using your puppet, explain that your puppet speaks differently than the kids and wants to learn to speak like them. The way he speaks makes him shy, so the kids need to help fix the puppet's words. Move the puppet's mouth while saying words drawn out, beginning with two-phoneme words such as it (iii–t). When the puppet says the word drawn out, he is embarrassed and turns away from the children. To help the puppet, the children must say the word correctly by blending the sounds and saying the word correctly (Blachman et al., 2016).

What's my word? Game. In this activity, the student has a page with images to choose from. The teacher says individual sounds in words and instructs the student to put a specific number next to the image that the sounds blend to make. This activity can be pre-recorded by the teacher and then completed in a center by a student. It requires students to listen to distinct sounds and then blend them together to identify the word the sounds form (FCRR, 2021).

Picture Slide. This is designed as a center activity but could be used in whole-group modeling or within small groups, as well. The teacher has segmented pictures that are broken into the number of phonemes the word contains. The teacher can model the sounds distinctly and then ask the student to blend the sounds together. For instance, the picture card for egg is in two pieces, so the teacher would model /e/…. /g/, and the student blends them together while putting the cards together. This is available on the Florida Center for Reading Research website (FCRR, 2021).

Name Game. When lining students up for recess or lunch, practice sound blending. Say a child's name in phonemes: "S….C….O….T". The child can line up when his/her name is "called" (Blevins, 2017).

Say it and Move it. In this activity, you say a word with two or three phonemes, such as the word *sip*. The student repeats the word and then the student segments the word into phonemes by saying the word slowly and moving the counters into the space you've designated (can be Elkonin boxes, you can also have arrows pointing down for each token to be pushed down). Once the student has all the counters moved down, she repeats the word while sliding her finger below the counters in a left-to-right sequence (Blackman et al., 2000).

Elkonin Boxes with pictures. These are often called Sound Boxes. Provide students with a picture of the named item you are blending such as a sea (tell them that's what it is so they're not using another word). Below the sea, include two boxes and model blending by pushing up the sounds /s/…./e/ and then saying the entire word. They initially segment these phonemes and then blend them together quickly. Remember the note about using continuous sounds before stop sounds. It is also important to start small. Begin by blending two-phoneme words (at, egg, bee) and progress to three phoneme words (CVC words- mop, soap, sun), and then four phoneme

words (trap, glass, nest). As students become better at blending, it is appropriate to add letters to these activities. Instead of a token, you can add letter cards or tiles and model sliding the letters up to build and blend words. When students have developed phonemic awareness, there is evidence to support the teaching of both phonemic awareness and phonics in combination as an effective instructional approach to helping students learn to read (Birsch & Carreker, 2018).

Letter time!

Fluid blending of letter sounds helps students to produce recognizable words (Birsch & Carreker, 2018). The following activities can help students to build their skills in fluid blending of letter sounds.

Say it and Move it with Letters. A variation on the previously discussed routine allows students to blend sounds connected with letters. Begin with continuous sounds. The introduction of letter sounds and new letters in a class should begin with a combination of specific letters that will allow for words to be made (Blackman et al., 2000). This practice can be supplemented with materials from various free resources provided by the University of Florida Literacy Institute Virtual Teaching Resource Hub and the Florida Center for Reading Research site. Elkonin boxes are accompanied by images that students will recognize and whose names can be blended to form words.

Decodable books. A useful scaffold for early readers learning to blend letter sounds is decodable books, in which vocabulary is controlled based on phonics patterns (Blevins, 2017). These books include the types of word and letter patterns that you are trying to build in your students. For instance, students learning to blend CVC words with the short vowel /a/ can use decodable readers built upon the short a pattern as a bridge linking letters, sounds, and meaning. The University of Florida Literacy Institute's [Foundations Toolbox](#) includes a decodable text guide that includes a variety of decodable texts for teachers' use. A caveat for use of decodable texts—use them to teach the target skill and then move on. Students need to read rich, authentic literature. However, decodables are a useful tool in teaching blending and building phonics knowledge.

Explicit instruction in phoneme blending can be engaging and effective and must be mastered for students to ultimately become readers. The focus here has been on adding strategies to the reader's toolbox for use in the classroom. It should be noted that there are many more strategies than could be shared—in addition, phonemic awareness involves much more than blending phonemes. That was simply the focus here. While it is important to acknowledge that students missed some critical learning during the Covid interruption to school, we can assume that such interruptions and disruptions may happen in the future, as well. As we observe gaps in students' skills, we can immediately build instruction upon student needs, allowing them the opportunity to become successful readers.

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Impacts of Phonological Awareness Intervention in Kindergarten

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Abstract

This quasi-experimental study examined the effects of targeted Tier 3 intervention in the area of phonological awareness among 10 kindergarten students situated in an elementary school in rural Appalachia. The intervention selected, the Heggerty Curriculum, incorporates structured, systematic, direct instruction through multisensory approaches to learning. Teachers providing intervention also receive professional development in the use of intervention materials. The assessment tool, Phonological Awareness Skills Test (PAST), was given at the beginning of the school year and again after 9 weeks of intervention to measure growth. The students received the intervention daily for approximately 20 minutes each session. When assessed at the end of the 9-week period, students showed significant growth as measured by a directional dependent t-test ($t(9) = 4.315$, $p = 0.001$, $d = 1.36$).

Introduction

Phonological awareness is an umbrella term that encompasses understanding the individual parts of spoken language (Cunningham, 2005; Honig et al., 2018). These skills are organized on four different, progressively smaller, more sophisticated and complex levels (Anthony et al., 2003; Honig et al., 2018; Lane & Pullen, 2004). These levels progress from the larger units of language, sentences and words, to the smaller units, syllables and onset-rimes, and finally the smallest units, phonemes (Honig et al., 2018).

Phonological awareness is an essential component of early literacy skills and can be a predictor of later reading achievement (Blachman, 1995; Kilpatrick, 2015; Lane & Pullen, 2004; Torgesen, 2002). In fact, Honig et al. (2018) estimate that the vast majority of students who have significant reading problems have a core deficit in their abilities to process phonological information. This may be especially true for students from low SES backgrounds (Nichols et al., 2004). Similarly, Scarborough (1998) found in a longitudinal study of children from age 2 through their 8th-grade year that these students' phonological awareness knowledge at the age of 5 years old directly impacted the student's overall reading abilities at the second-grade level.

Word and Onset-Rime Levels of Phonological Skills

This study focused on phonological awareness at two levels—the word level, identifying words in sentences, and onset level, recognizing and producing rhymes. In word-level phonological awareness skills, students listen to a sentence and separate those sentences into words by clapping at each word or counting the number of words they hear. Word-level phonological

awareness also involves working with compound words, but these skills were not examined in this study. At the onset level, students listen to words and identify whether or not these words rhyme or when given a word, orally produce a new word that rhymes with that given word (Cunningham, 2005; Honig et al., 2018). As students progressively develop phonological awareness, they move to the phonemic awareness level, identifying the smallest units of language.

Intervention and Instruction: Heggerty Curriculum

The Heggerty Curriculum's features align with research on effective instruction. Research suggests effective instruction lasts a minimum of 15 minutes a day (Bratsch-Hines, et al., 2020) and includes a component of professional development for teachers providing instruction (Alghazo et al., 2010; Brady, S. et al., 2009; Vernon-Feagans, 2018). Additionally, the program aligns with research on explicit, systematic instruction with an integration of phonological awareness skills as well as early alphabet skills (Jones et al., 2012; Nichols et al., 2004; Oudeans et al., 2003).

The Heggerty Curriculum systematically and explicitly teaches both phonological awareness and alphabet skills in a parallel manner. The 10-15 minute lessons are all oral and auditory with no printed words shown to students and can be used with the whole class in Tier 1 instruction as well as small group or individual instruction as part of a Tier 2 or Tier 3 intervention. The program is supported by professional learning that is ongoing throughout the school year in Professional Learning Community structures and in whole group settings to discuss the program's progression and success (Heggerty, 2022).

Methodology

The purpose of this research was to examine the foundational literacy skills achievement of Tier 3 intervention kindergartners after being taught phonemic awareness skills through the Heggerty curriculum for 15 minutes daily over the course of two months. Specifically, this study examined student growth in two areas: word-level skills and onset-rime-level skills.

Population, Sample, and Setting

For this quasi-experimental study, the kindergarten classrooms were the focus, specifically, two kindergarten classrooms with 18 students in each class. Of the collective 36 kindergarten students, the study reduced the sample to 10 students in these classrooms who were identified as needing Tier 3 intervention in the area of phonological awareness. It should be noted this study was conducted in the school year following the pandemic year that closed the schools. In the previous year, only 3 of the 10 identified students received any preschool services. The other 7 students were identified as receiving *home* or *in child care* prior to the kindergarten year according to demographic information collected from the Brigance assessment.

Of the 10 students selected for this study, 8 were identified as female and 2 as male. All of the students were categorized as Caucasian, non-Hispanic, and ranged in age from 5-6 years old at the start of the study. All of the students included were receiving Tier 3 intervention services in reading which means the students were identified as performing below the 15th percentile according to the STAR Early Literacy assessment, and all of the students met the criteria for free and reduced lunch.

The school where this study was conducted is in a northeastern, rural, county in Kentucky. The population of the school as a whole meets the criteria for free and reduced lunch. The PK-5 school has approximately 175 students total and is the smallest school in the district.

Instrumentation

The data were collected with the Phonological Awareness Skills Test (PAST), a valid and reliable assessment of phonological awareness (Kilpatrick, 2005). Specifically, data on word-level phonological awareness skills which encompasses both word and onset-rime levels: Rhyme Recognition, Rhyme Production, and Concept of Spoken Word were measured. This assessment is informal and assesses the students relatively quickly with 6 questions in each section for a total of 18 possible points. The PAST assessment was administered at the beginning of the school year and every two weeks for a 9-week period.

Figure 1. Images of the first section of the PAST Assessment. (Zgonc, 2000)

Rhyme Production
Accept real and nonsense words
Record response
___pain   _____
___cake   _____
___hop   _____
___see   _____
___dark   _____
___candy   _____

Phonological Awareness Skills Test (PAST adapted to fit on one page Zgonc, 2000)

Name_____ Date _____ School _____ Grade_____

Concept of Spoken Word
___Tom ran home. (3)
___I have two pets. (4)
___Did you eat lunch? (4)
___What are you doing? (4)
___Terry loves to play soccer. (5)
___Yesterday it rained. (3)

Total _____

Rhyme Recognition
___bed– fed (yes)
___top– hop (yes)
___run – soap (no)
___hand – sand (yes)
___funny – bunny (yes)
___girl – giant (no)

Total _____

To administer the PAST assessment, the student sits with the teacher and completes each section orally. The student is provided manipulatives that can be used to represent chunks of language. The teacher begins with the *Concept of Spoken Word* portion and asks the student to show or tell her how many words can be heard in each sentence. The teacher says the sentence out loud in a normal speaking tone, then the student may count or represent the number of words present in the sentence with the manipulatives.

The next section of PAST, *Rhyme Recognition,* directs students to indicate whether the word pairs rhyme or not. The student hears the word pair once, and the teacher may repeat them one time if asked to do so. The student responds with yes or no to indicate if the words rhyme. The last part of the assessment, *Rhyme Production,* requires the student to generate a rhyming word after hearing a base word provided by the teacher. The first base word is "pain" to which the student might respond "cane" or "mane" or "train". Any response is accepted as long as it rhymes. Even nonsense words are accepted as correct responses according to assessment directions.

Examples of nonsense words would be: zain, fain, and nain.

Students must score at least 15 out of 18 to be considered at mastery level on this skill set. If the student scores 12-14 out of 18 possible points, the student is considered to be approaching mastery. This assessment is rather quick (completed in 5-8 minutes) and can be used bi-weekly for progress monitoring purposes.
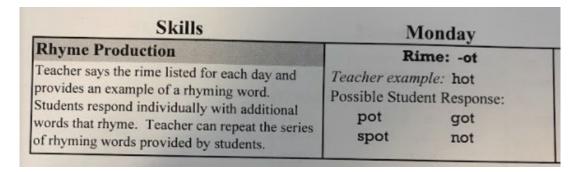
Intervention and Procedure

The students identified as requiring Tier 3 intervention support were placed in small groups of no more than 4 to receive 15-20 minutes of intervention daily (Monday through Friday) using the Heggerty Curriculum (Heggerty, 2022). The students were provided lessons for 9 weeks. In total, there were 43 lessons presented to students accounting for two days of canceled school. Some students were absent during the duration of the study, but all students received at least 35 lessons.
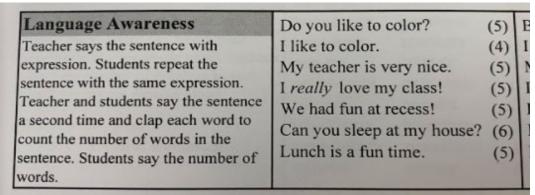
The lessons were all oral and consisted of 10 parts: Rhyming, Onset Fluency, Blending, Isolating Final/Medial Sounds, Segmenting, Adding, Deleting, Substituting, Alphabet Knowledge, and Language Awareness.

Each instructional part consisted of approximately five oral language practice tasks similar to the tasks found in the PAST assessment. Specifically, the Rhyming and Language Awareness portions of the Heggerty Curriculum directly correlate to the three parts of the PAST assessment in question.

Figure 2. Example of rhyme production task in Heggerty. (Heggerty, 2020)

Skills	Monday
Rhyme Production	**Rime: -ot**
Teacher says the rime listed for each day and provides an example of a rhyming word. Students respond individually with additional words that rhyme. Teacher can repeat the series of rhyming words provided by students.	*Teacher example:* hot Possible Student Response: pot got spot not

Figure 3. Example of a concept of word-in-text task in the Heggerty Curriculum (Heggerty, 2020).

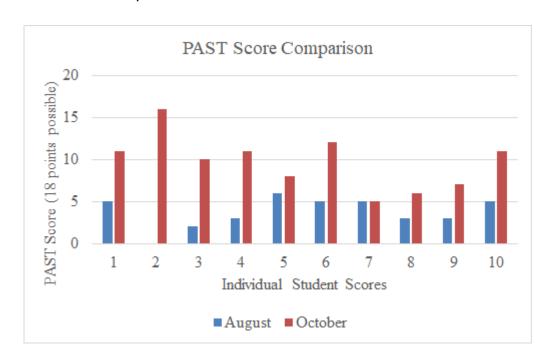| Language Awareness		
Teacher says the sentence with expression. Students repeat the sentence with the same expression. Teacher and students say the sentence a second time and clap each word to count the number of words in the sentence. Students say the number of words.	Do you like to color? (5) I like to color. (4) My teacher is very nice. (5) I *really* love my class! (5) We had fun at recess! (5) Can you sleep at my house? (6) Lunch is a fun time. (5)	E I N I I

These lessons are multi-sensory because the teacher incorporates movement into the lessons. For example, the students may clap to represent words or sounds and use hand signals when necessary to represent what they hear. The students may also choose to use manipulatives to represent the parts of language they hear.

It should be noted that professional development was a significant component of the study. All Tier 3 intervention teachers received 6 hours of professional development on phonological awareness prior to the study. Professional development consisted of understanding the skill, modeling, and assessment practice with peers. In addition, the teachers had monthly Google Meets synchronous sessions to support professional learning from onset of the study. During these sessions, teachers shared outcomes and discussed any concerned or observed student successes.

Data Analysis

Two data sets were analyzed utilizing a 1-tailed dependent t-test to find the p-value. The first set of PAST data was examined after students were selected for Tier 3 intervention. In August, the mean score for the 10 selected students was 3.7 out of 18 possible points with a standard deviation of 1.829.

In late October, after receiving the intervention, when the same students were assessed again using the PAST assessment, the mean score for the students rose to 9.7 out of a possible 18 points. The standard deviation was calculated at 3.268.

Table 1: PAST Score Comparisons

According to 1-tailed dependent t-test results, $t(9) = 4.315$, $p = 0.001$, $d = 1.36$ there was a significant increase in the student's scores from the first test administration to the second administration of the test after receiving intervention.

Table 2: t-Test Computations

t-test Computation between August and October							
	N	M	SD	df	t	p	d
August	10	3.700	1.829	9	4.315	0.001	1.36
October	10	9.700	3.268				

Results and Findings

Results can identify the intervention as a key element leading to the growth in these students' scores. The students were engaged in daily structured lessons that were only focused on phonological awareness in the Tier 3 setting. Therefore, results suggest this intervention was effective. Overall, the intervention appeared to be successful within all the demographics the subjects presented with limited information on the effectiveness of the intervention in gender due to the small sample. This suggests the intervention provided to this small group of students did have a significant overall positive effect on the students' growth in phonological awareness.

Limitations

The duration of the study was relatively brief, a 9-week period and the sample was small, 10 kindergarten students who were identified as requiring Tier 3 intervention at the school. This limited sample resulted in anomalies within the population's attendance in the sessions. Furthermore, because this study was conducted during a pandemic-laden school year, the attendance for all students was not always consistent. Although the students received the intervention over an 8-week period, the actual number of sessions for each student ranged between 35 and 45 sessions at 15 minutes each.

Delimitations

For this study, assessment of phonological awareness skills for this study was narrowed to only word and onset-rime levels. This study focused on kindergarten students who were struggling, therefore it measured only word level and onset-rime phonological awareness skills. It did not assess students on syllable level or phoneme level skills because these students were not developmentally ready for instruction in these areas.

Conclusions and Recommendations

While this study has limitations in the number of students contained and the short duration, there are significant positive differences in the scores of the students between late August and late October (p = 0.001). In addition, with the exception of one student in the study, all of the

students showed growth in the area of word level and onset-rime level phonological awareness.

It is strongly recommended that students who demonstrate below mastery scores in the area of phonological awareness should receive extra minutes of instruction, specifically a structured, systematic, and multi-sensory form of instruction. Finally, future research is recommended to determine the effectiveness of intervention among larger groups of students over longer periods of time.

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The Power of One-On-One Writing Conferences

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to examine the value of "One-on-One Writing Conferences" with P-12 students. In doing so, I used the experience of my pre-service teachers to illustrate the effectiveness of the "One-on-One Writing Conference" by exploring their practices while conferencing with P-12 students during their Field Experience. These pre-service teachers worked with one target student to help the P-12 students improve their writing skills. In doing so, the pre-service teachers practiced incorporating multiple writing strategies to help students to engage, generate and collect ideas, bring focus and meaning to their compositions, use intentional language, elaborate, and structure their writing process. In the end, this article should help us to reflect on how one-on-one writing conferences work to prompt P-12 students to advance important writing skills and gain motivation and confidence in what they compose.

Keywords: Writing conference, writing skills, generating ideas, structured writing

Introduction

What is a writing conference, and what is the purpose of writing conferences? Writing conferences as portrayed in some of the literacy literature, characterize writing conference as a one-on-one conversation between a teacher and a student with the objective of granting an opportunity for the students to explore and improve their writing skills and an opportunity for teachers to give the students specific feedback on their writing. The aim of this article is to reflect on how one-on-one writing conferences might work to prompt P-12 students to advance important writing skills and gain motivation and confidence in what they compose.

Purpose of writing conferences

Here, while depicting writing conferences, Carl Anderson (2000), a prolific writer on "writing conferences," asserts that one of the objectives of writing conferences with young learners is to aid them in learning specific aspects of writing that they could use in future circumstances. Anderson (2000) maintains that by conducting these writing conferences, teachers are adding to the students' repertoires, which in turn, might help students become better writers over time. Anderson (2000) also explains that teacher-student writing conferences have a purpose, follow a predictable structure, and put students in a position of being partners in collaboration. Holbrook and Salinger (2018) add that children learn to write by writing for a specific purpose about things that matter to them. Thus, conducting a one-on-one writing conference gives the context to have students explore topics of their interest.

Serravello (2000) adds to this conversation by stating that one of the benefits of writing conferences, is the fact that the writer can get immediate feedback about their writing, which

could help the writer to feel confident, and as a result, start to elaborate on their piece with productive suggestions.

Some educators like to point out that in general, students do not like to write. But, Graves (1983b) on the other hand, reminds us that the truth is that students do want to write the first day they attend school. Graves (1983b) goes on to say that "this is by no accident, since before they arrive at school, young learners marked up walls, pavement, newspapers with crayons, chalk, pens, or pencils ... anything that makes a mark. The child's marks say, 'I am.' (p. 21)."

Graves (1983) explains that as elementary school teachers, our job is to monitor the child, let the child talk, and let the child understand that what the child knows is very important. However, those of us who teach young learners, know all too well that young writers are often faced with some measure of lack of confidence in their own writing skills, thus, they become hesitant to write. With that said, it is important for us teachers to be reminded that teachers tend to dominate the conversation while conducting these writing conferences, and consequently, we tend to talk a lot more than the students. This conversation dominance could add to these young writers not feeling compelled to share their writing with others because they might feel embarrassed about what they have composed.

To minimize this problem, Carl Anderson (2000) offers some tips on how to get students to talk during writing conferences:

1. Give minilessons about what students can talk about with you.
2. Show students videos of conferences and ask them to notice what the students do and what they talk about.
3. Confer with a student in front of your class and chart what the class notices.

Nonetheless, what I have observed as I accompany my teacher-candidates to their field experience, is that while involved in writing conferences, young writers actually, might feel that the teacher or peer as a one-on-one audience is much less judgmental than a larger audience. This insight, in turn, works to help students feel more comfortable making mistakes and learning from these mistakes. With that said, writing conferences might prove effective to help improve students' confidence in their own ability to write, because this context could offer an opportunity for them to feel more confident to take risks on mechanics and possible topics.

Communicating with students during writing conferences

Teacher-student writing conferences according to Hawkins (2019) are considered a vital component of instruction by accomplished writing teachers, and as a result, writing conference has become a common practice in today's primary-grade classrooms. Hawkins (2019) warns us, however, that what teachers say and how they say it during the writing conferences has the power to shape the opportunities for student learning that are possible in classrooms. Hawkins (2019) adds to her narrative by stating that these opportunities, might work to build an understanding of the talk that arises during primary-grade writing conferences, and these conversations could become meaningful as a pedagogical process. Additionally, Douglas (2000) notes that the teacher's interpersonal relationship with students often has an impact on how students become motivated to work. Moreover, Carl Anderson (2000) adds that in writing conferences students become known to the teacher as a person, a writer, and as a learner. This

reality makes room for the teacher to get to know the students individually, and consequently, as the teacher learns to know each child, the teacher can shape and adjust the teaching as necessary to meet the particular needs of that student. According to Carl Anderson (2000), these writing conferences provide the context for the teacher to learn about the student as much as the student can learn about the teacher:

Teacher Learn about the students	Students Learn about the Teacher
Learn about students' interest	Teacher Cares about the student as people and writer
What the students are thinking about their lives and the world	It's safe to talk to the teacher about writing
Students' personalities	Teacher is intensely interested in students as writers
Students' attitudes toward school and learning	Teacher personality
Students' attitudes about writing and what they like to write about	
How students interact with teachers	
How writing goes for the students	
Students' attitude toward taking risks	
How students are growing as writers over the course of the school year	
Students' frustration levels	

Moreover, Altemeier, Jones, Abbot, and Berninger (2006) sustain, that students need to develop an early foundation in writing, in order to communicate their ideas successfully and efficiently.

One-On-One Writing Conference Task

To illustrate this point, I draw on a task that I use in my writing class. My P-5 education majors are asked to conduct four writing conferences with at least two target students during their field experience clinicals. While preparing these students (teacher candidates) to conduct the writing conferences, they expressed concerns about going into the task. These teacher candidates considered themselves modestly confident writers, which would then place themselves in a challenging position for not knowing how to ask/respond to the P-5 students' writing needs. Despite their apprehension about conducting writing conferences, my students (teacher candidates) were tasked with an assignment (Appendix A) in which they had to meet with a couple of target students for 4 sessions (four days) where they would conduct multiple writing conferences in an effort to help the students to elaborate, draft, revise and edit their writing piece and strengthen their confidence in writing. The positive results of this task surprised not only me but my clinical students as well, for they were astonished by the encouraging outcomes and the

impact it had not only on the P-5 students but also on themselves as potential teachers. Here are some excerpts of some questions asked by my students (teacher candidates) and the P-5 responses.

What did you learn from this experience (question asked to the teacher candidates)?

1. *I learned the importance of first learning about what the student wants to write about, then, I learned the importance of providing strategies and feedback that are specific to each student's needs. I also saw how each student writes and approaches writing differently. I want to help find the strengths of each of my students to help them have more confidence in their writing skills and have positive self-efficacy. Writing conference is a very useful tool that I plan to use in my classroom.*
2. *I learned to ask questions that would prompt students to choose a topic and elaborate on their writing.*
3. *I learned that sometimes you have to be able to adapt on the fly. Not everything will go exactly as planned. For example, the student changed the topic multiple times, so I had to use some strategies to help the student to focus and stick to one topic.*
4. *One thing I learned from this experience is how important writing conferences are for the students. They need one on one time for them to develop their writing skills. This is something I plan to use in my own classroom.*

Were you satisfied with the outcome of the conference? Yes, no, why?

1. *I was very satisfied with the outcome of the conference. I feel like the student learned a lot from this conference with me. The student was very eager and excited to make changes and edits to her writing. I think she also learned to use strategies that she can continue to use when engaged in writing. The student said that she had never thought of herself as a good writer before this experience.*

2. *Yes, I was satisfied with the outcome of the conference. The student and I were both proud of the work that was accomplished, and all the conferences went very smoothly. I had never taught writing before, so the writing conference taught me how to be a better writing teacher. I also learned how to improve my own writing skills by using the same strategies I used with my target student.*

Writing Conferences as a Powerful Tool

This illustration confirms the assumption that writing conferences, as represented in much of the literacy literature, are a powerful tool to help students sharpen their writing skills and develop confidence in what they compose. For instance, Anderson (2000) explains that teacher-student writing conferences have a purpose, for they follow a predictable structure, and put students in a position of being partners in collaboration (Anderson, 2000). Moreover, Graves (1982) adds to this conversation by presenting six characteristics of successful writing conferences:

1. Have a predictable structure;
2. Focus on a few points;
3. Demonstrate solutions to students' problems;
4. Permit role reversals;

5. Encourage the use of a vocabulary appropriate for writing;
6. Stimulate pleasure in writing. Most teachers use some variant of these characteristics in their classroom.

Beyond the Success in the classroom

We all might agree that writing is fundamentally important for success in the classroom, but beyond the success in the classroom, students also need to prepare for their future professional and community lives as well. Thus, writing skills are crucial for the development of young writers as future professionals and effective members of their communities. Nonetheless, Altemeier et al. (2006) contends that a substantive number of American students do not have strong writing skills to effectively meet the demands of today's workplaces. Altemeier et al. (2006) claim that less than one-third of all students performed at or above the "proficient" level in writing on the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress Writing Assessment.

While explaining the reasons behind American students not being strong writers and offering suggestions to improve students' writing skills, Altemeier et al. (2006) points to the connection between reading and writing as a tool to help students to want to develop writing skills. They remind us that children first learn to read and to write and then they learn to integrate these two written language systems.

Altemeier et al. (2006) notes that as teachers attempt to introduce writing conferences in order to motivate students to write, it is important to remember that executive functions are also needed to self-regulate the integration process across two written language systems (reading and writing).

Altemeier et al. (2006) contends that class and homework assignments in Grades 4 and above often require students to develop executive functions (mental self-government) to integrate reading and writing. This process entails students first needing to read content text and take written notes about the material, and then being able to convert those written notes into written reports or other assignments. Altemeier et al. (2006) concludes that successful completion of integrated reading and writing activities requires not only the ability to read and write but also requires a clear understanding and interpretation of the tasks at hand.

Given that we have explored the crucial role of sound writing skills, and the reasons why writing conferences can help students develop good writing skills, here we will discuss some writing conference strategies while meeting one-on-one with young writers. As demonstrated by my clinical students' responses and the writings of Carl Anderson (2000), one of the first moves to make while conducting a writing conference is to discover what the student wants to do as a writer. Carl Anderson (2018) suggests that while starting a writing conference, teachers should ask simple questions such as "how is it going?" This strategy could lead the student to explore their ideas and topics of their interest. It can also prompt the student to give some response that might help organize their own thoughts. According to Carl Anderson (2000), during these brief writing conferences, young writers can get immediate feedback about their writing, which in turn, could help the writer to feel confident, and as a result, start to elaborate on their piece with fruitful suggestions.

Here, Hawkins (2019) states that findings from a multiple-case study of writing conference representation in both a kindergarten and a first-grade classroom, elucidated a variety of commanding and dialogic discourses made available to child participants during conference interactions. These findings according to Hawkins (2019) range from:

1. Enactments that empower students to co-construct ideas and meaning with their teachers as dialogic partners (e.g., conferencing as verbal rehearsal, conferencing as criterion-specific collaboration).

2. Traditional recitation patterns in which students are given little space to contribute to the conversation (e.g., conferencing as transcription activity, conferencing as a find-and-fix correction).

3. Determining the role child writers are invited to assume within a given conference interaction.

Conclusion

As Hawkins (2019) notes, writing teachers interested in making the most of one-on-one writing conferences with students, need to frequently assess their writing conference practices in order to find the means that it might work for individual students in different circumstances. Nonetheless, it is clear to all of us writing teachers, that one-on-one writing conferences work to prompt students to advance important writing skills and gain motivation and confidence in what they compose. Gibson (2008) notes that young learners need clear scaffolding constructed within skillfully delivered instructional conversations that address the language, knowledge, and strategies required for problem-solving in writing. In light of all the arguments made here, it has become clear that writing conferences have the right context to help students to gain confidence in their writing skills.

Nonetheless, as Keebler (1995) reminds us, it is important to be aware that during these writing conferences, the teachers' tasks are to help young learners to develop their thinking by asking questions, making comments, or introducing different ideas that might encourage and force students to think more and create more diverse ideas.

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Appendix A: Assignment

"For this project you are asked to meet with one or two students during your Field Experience; ask them to write an essay appropriate for their age and grade level. Subsequently, you are to conduct 4 Writing Conferences with the aim of helping the students to elaborate, revise, edit and refine their writing piece."

Please generate Ideas (ahead of time) that you might use to help students choose a topic (This is your Bank of Ideas):
1. *Use your senses to think of more details.*
2. *When did this happen?*
3. *What did you feel when it happened?*
4. *What could you tell a reader about this?*
5. *Let's focus on the timeline of the story.*

Ask the students what they are planning to do to write.
1. *"What do you think you want to write about?"*
2. *"What are some things you are interested in?"*
3. *"Do you know what you want to write about?"*
4. *"What are some things you are interested in?*

What Intentional Language did you use? (List at least 5)
1. *How are you doing today?*
2. *What do you want to write about?*
3. *Tell me more about this.*
4. *That is a strong idea.*
5. *What is your favorite type of writing?*
6. *How could you improve as a writer?*
7. *How do you feel about your writing?*
8. *I really enjoy this point you made.*
9. *We could expand and add feeling for the reader.*
10. *Use this strategy to edit your essay.*