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Message From the Editor

BY LINA B. SOARES, PH.D.

As teachers of literacy, we already know the power of reading, but more importantly, we have the unique position to help our students succeed in school and in life. We understand that reading is the most fundamental skill that will enrich the lives of our learners and so we continually strive to find the most effective instructional strategies to implement in our classrooms. On that note, I am pleased to offer the Spring 2018 issue of the *Georgia Journal of Reading*. This issue is a smart bouquet of research and researched-based instructional strategies that will provide classroom teachers and teacher educators the tools to promote literacy and build knowledge for all of our learners. As always, I thank our wonderful Editorial Board for the countless hours spent reviewing and offering their expert comments. I also want to send a Big Shout Out to Taylor Shultz, my former GA, who is now a full time classroom teacher but still manages to assist the *Georgia Journal of Reading* in the evenings while learning the demands of a first year teacher.

“Give the Neurological Impress Method Another Chance for One-to-One Fluency Interventions” by Melissa M. Mitchell and Vassiliki Zygouris-Coe brings attention to a research method that was developed quite some time ago for use in speech and language therapy but as the researchers report, it is not widely known that the Neurological Impress Method (NIM) can be used with disfluent readers. This phenomenological research study is a report of the findings that teacher participants and tutors experienced while reading side-by-side with six disfluent readers.

Marisa Gonzalez and Robert A. Griffin offer a veritable toolkit of instructional strategies used to build English learners’ (ELs) reading comprehension. The authors emphasize the importance that instruction must be an integration of explicit vocabulary instruction and reading strategies in order for ELs to understand the meaning of words. Given the ever-increasing linguistically diverse students in today’s classrooms, “Building Comprehension through Explicit and Organic Vocabulary Instruction for English Learners” is a must read.

“Children’s Literature to Develop Awareness and Advocacy for Social Justice” by Katie Kelly and Lindsay Yearata is an interesting article that builds the case for implementing diverse literature in elementary classrooms. The authors report a research project that involved a group of fifth grade students and preservice teachers who teamed to read and discuss through blogging *A Long Walk to Water* (Park, 2010) as a means to bring awareness to social injustices in students’ lives and to take action for social change. The authors offer multiple implications and classroom extensions when teaching for social justice.

Shawna Helf, Lindsay Yearata, and Kavin Ming provide a smart focus for utilizing often overlooked periods of the day to increase young students’ early literacy skills. “Maximizing Learning: Embedding Phonological Awareness throughout the Day” centers on how classroom teachers can turn periods of transition time in the classroom into opportunities for their students to build phonological awareness. The article is replete with multiple strategies, procedures, and support tips that classroom teachers can employ to maximize students’ phonemic awareness.

Greetings to all GRA members,

Spring has sprung, but unfortunately Mother Nature hasn't yet noticed. Here in the very southeast corner of Georgia, I had to run the heat this morning. Nobody except Georgia Power is in favor of this prolonged cold snap but it's here I'll stay until and when the temperature rises.

Still, it warms my heart to know that you continue to be supportive of the Georgia Reading Association and all it accomplishes and provide for teachers, administrators, and others throughout GA. With the name change from IRA (International Reading Association) to ILA (International Literacy Association), each state affiliated with ILA had to create a new name with literacy in its title. After much consideration, your GRA Board of Directors chose the acronym GALA and the Georgia Association of Literacy Advocates as our new name. I'm pleased that we've received some very positive feedback for how all-encompassing this new name is in terms of everyone's concern for the state of literacy throughout Georgia. Note that our website will remain the same at this time: www.georgiareading.org.

Our annual GRA Reader of the Year event will be held, once again, at The Assembly of Warner Robins in Byron, GA, on Sunday, May 6th, at 3:00 pm. Well over 100 entries have been sent for consideration after local schools and councils have winnowed down their even larger numbers to the "winners" of their respective schools. You are all welcome to join us for this exciting event. See the GRA website under the Events tab for pictures from the 2017 celebration, including a picture of Leonardo Yue alongside his sponsoring teacher, Kasey Kurey, and Richard Woods, the Georgia State Superintendent of Schools. Leonardo won the 2017 Lindy Lopez-Butner Award for Secondary students, grades 6-12.

This year, GRA Summer Leadership will be held on the campus of the University of West Georgia in Carrollton, June 10-12. We will be staying in one of the new dorms (though of course you can commute from wherever you live) and begin early Sunday afternoon with a boxed lunch and reports from your Executive Board and committee chairs. Beginning late Monday, after all other local business and initiation of new officers has taken place, we will be addressed by Tiffany Sears, ILA Chapter and Region Services Manager. Tiffany will continue Monday addressing the important transition from IRA to ILA and from GRA to GALA. This vital training will guide us in our three-year development plan as laid out by changes in federal tax laws and how they affect organization such as the GRA. If you have any interest whatsoever in becoming more involved in GRA, please plan to join us for as much time as you can spare during these three days; we would certainly welcome your presence and your input.

It has been an honor serving as the president of GRA. A dedicated group of individuals has guided the workings of this organization for many years and we owe a debt of gratitude for their years of service. We still struggle, somewhat, to maintain an active membership base and to that end have extended our BOGO (Buy One – Give One) membership special through June 31. If you renew or join GRA for \$20, you may "give" a free membership to a friend or professional colleague for absolutely no cost; for college students and retirees, it's only \$10. Two college students in a teacher ed program can join GRA for \$5.00 each; that's less than the cost of a fancy cup of coffee and a cinnamon roll.

If you know of someone to whom I can send a paper copy (six pages - in color) of the 2017 fall newsletter, the GRA *Focus*, please send me a name and address – thanks. We want to spread the good news of all we do to as many folks interested in our excellent group throughout the state as possible. And now, enjoy this newest issue of the *Georgia Journal of Reading*.

Ron Reigner

President, Georgia Reading Association

Give the Neurological Impress Method Another Chance for One-to-One Fluency Interventions

BY MELISSA M. MITCHELL AND
DR. VASSILIKI ZYGOURIS-COE



Abstract

Students who do not show growth from whole class (Tier 1) and small group (Tier 2) reading fluency interventions, may require one-on-one interventions that are designed to support the development of fluent oral reading. The authors of this article reintroduce the Neurological Impress Method (NIM) and provide a research-based protocol and practical recommendations for implementation. Existing research on the NIM provides evidence for giving it another chance for one-on-one reading fluency interventions.

Sophia is a fifth-grade student who is below grade level in reading. Her teacher, Mrs. Smith, is concerned because Sophia is very disfluent in her oral reading and often labors through text when reading aloud. Mrs. Smith asks students to read aloud a grade level passage with a partner, as a part of the core literacy instruction. She notices that Sophia is stumbling over words and appears visibly upset. Sophia begins to turn red and reads with a shaky voice. Fearful that Sophia is on the verge of crying, Mrs. Smith has a private conference with her to find out what is wrong. Sophia tells Mrs. Smith that she hates reading aloud in class because she thinks she 'sounds like a baby'. Sophia feels like everyone in the class is staring at her when she reads because she does not read smoothly. Mrs.

Smith knows grade level text is too difficult for Sophia, so she provides lower level passages to practice oral reading fluency. She is baffled because Sophia's oral reading fluency is improving when she reads text at a lower level, but when Sophia reads grade level text she struggles. In addition to Tier 1 support, Sophia is receiving Tier 2 structured reading interventions, but Mrs. Smith doesn't know how to further support her oral reading development when reading grade level material in class.

Many teachers may find that they are in the same position as Mrs. Smith, unable to support struggling students with reading aloud grade level texts. The scenario described above was based on personal experiences, as described by the teacher in that fifth-grade classroom. Sophia is pseudonym of a student participating in the NIM in the present study. These reading challenges may impact students receiving support through Response to Intervention (RtI) as well as students identified with disabilities, especially when they have prolonged documented deficiencies in oral reading fluency. The Report of the National Reading Panel (NRP) (2000) defined fluency as the ability "to read orally with speed, accuracy, and proper expression" (p. 193). Students struggling with fluency need guided instruction using oral reading techniques. The purpose of this article is to reintroduce the

Neurological Impress Method (NIM) as a viable strategy to support guided practice of oral reading as a one-to-one intervention for students struggling with fluency. This article also includes a description of the NIM in action in a fifth-grade classroom. This easy to implement strategy is appropriate for disfluent readers who, like Sophia, have failed to make progress in developing oral reading fluency after receiving Tier 1 and 2 interventions, as one part of a structured intensive intervention or in addition to a structured reading intervention.

Struggling Readers in an Era of New Educational Policies

The context surrounding struggling readers, relating to educational policy, has a vital impact on the implementation of any instructional practice or intervention. The 2004 reauthorization of Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) brought forth many changes in literacy instruction. Prior to implementation, poor readers were often identified as having a “specific learning disability” (SLD) through an IQ test. This widely implemented practice failed to predict how well a child would respond to intervention, even though research showed a positive response to early effective intervention (Johnston, 2011). One transformation that developed from IDEIA was a Response to Intervention (RtI) framework, bringing a critical change in how educators respond to struggling readers (Hawkins, Marsicano, Schmitt, McCallum, & Musti-Rao, 2015; Yell, 2006). Educators are now required to provide intensive interventions supported with scientific evidence, with regular progress monitoring to ensure effectiveness of instructional practices, while also ensuring instructional practices align to weak areas in reading proficiency. Educators may find this task to be even more challenging as expectations for student achievement increase.

The most recent change to educational policy came from the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) initiative (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers [NGA & CCSSO], 2010). Demands for student achievement in literacy have increased drastically. According to the CCSS for English Language Arts and Literacy Standard 10 (i.e., Range, Quality, & Complexity), students are expected to have regular practice with complex text and academic language. Schools have been making CCSS-related instructional shifts to prepare students for the increased demands of complex text and the need for them to develop deep levels of comprehension that go beyond literal and inferential understanding. Main shifts resulting from new educational standards include (a) regular practice with complex texts and academic language; (b) reading, writing, and speaking

grounded in evidence from texts, both literary and informational; and, (c) building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction. In the midst of all of these shifts and in states’ efforts to best prepare students for new assessments, reading fluency seems to have taken a back seat. Keeping up with ever-changing educational policies could make it challenging to identify and implement best practices in literacy instruction and intervention (Papola-Ellis, 2014).

Why Fluency?

Reading fluency enables the reader to invest energy in meaning-making instead of on decoding (Rasinski, 2006). The NRP (2000) found that students struggling with disfluent reading were at higher risk for reading comprehension difficulties. According to the 2015 report from National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 36% of students scored proficient or above on the 4th grade reading assessment, while 34% of eighth grade students scored proficient or above, showing that many students tested in the nation cannot read at a proficient level. In their study, Valencia and Buly (2004) found fluency to be a contributing factor to students’ lack of proficiency on state standardized reading assessments.

There are several schools of thought on the relationship between fluency and comprehension. According to Young et al. (2015), the relationship between disfluent reading and low standardized assessment scores can be explained by LaBerge’s and Samuel’s (1974) Theory of Automatic Processing. As the theory suggests, when students decode word-by-word lacking automaticity, or the ability to quickly recognize words without effort, they may lack the cognitive ability to focus attention on the processes needed for comprehension.

Automaticity may not be the only factor in fluency’s impact on reading comprehension as prosodic reading is also necessary. Educators can relate prosody to a reader’s variation in loudness and pitch as well as duration and pauses in oral reading (Benjamin, & Schwanenflugel, 2010; Kuhn, Schwanenflugel, & Meisinger, 2010). Some think of prosody as a byproduct of oral reading, but studies suggest readers hear an inner voice while reading and use expression to aid in comprehension (Rasinski & Young, 2014). Development of prosodic, fluent reading is vital for students to master comprehension skills needed to be successful on CCSS (NGA & CCSSO, 2010).

How is Fluency Developed?

Most researchers agree fluent reading is developed through practice of oral reading techniques (Anderson, 1981). However, there is some disagreement regarding the most effective methods for the development

of fluency (NRP, 2000). Several popular methods are echo reading, assisted reading, choral reading, repeated reading, and wide reading. In echo reading, the student echoes or repeats a portion of text read aloud by the teacher. Another popular method is choral reading, students and the teacher read text in unison, usually in a whole group or small group setting. In assisted reading, the child and adult read aloud portions of text together, either in an echo format or in a choral reading (Anderson, 1981). Research has shown the practice of repeated reading, using a range of texts with classroom practice, increases oral reading fluency for disfluent readers (Boulay, Goodson, Frye, Blocklin, Price, & National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, 2015). In repeated reading, a student will reread a text either a predetermined number of times or until fluency is achieved, with regular corrective feedback from the teacher (Samuels, 1979). Allington (2014) makes the argument that wide reading, reading large volumes of texts across topics and genres, increases all areas in reading proficiency, including fluency. These techniques have a long history, but are they sufficiently assisting students who struggle with fluency in building the foundational skills needed to master current educational standards?

Reading Interventions

What about students who continue to struggle with fluent reading despite receiving support in Tier 1 instruction? The first step in helping these students is through early identification of reading difficulties. Effective practices begin with core instruction that is explicit and systematic, using evidence-based instructional strategies and techniques (Boulay et al., 2015) and include universal screening to identify students at risk for reading difficulties (Connor, Alberto, Compton, O'Connor & National Center for Special, Education Research, 2014). Identified students need access to targeted instruction outside of core curriculum with regular progress monitoring, typically administered in a small group setting (Tier 2). If students still aren't progressing, they may need additional support through one-to-one (Tier 3) interventions. Educators target specific reading skills and monitor the student's response to the intervention. The resulting data should be used in the decision-making process, including possible identification for services in exceptional education (Wanzek et al., 2013).

Disfluent readers need targeted practices addressing oral reading fluency. With the correlation between fluency and reading proficiency, these questions remain: Are educators doing enough to assist disfluent readers in development of fluent oral reading? What other strategies could assist educators in meeting the

needs of students who are struggling with fluent oral reading and are not benefiting from existing Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions?

Neurological Impress Method (NIM): A Forgotten Intervention

Heckelman's (1966) underutilized assisted reading strategy, the NIM, is a promising intervention for students struggling with disfluent reading. The NIM (Heckelman, 1966) has a research base going back decades; however, it is not widely practiced in classrooms because few educators are aware of the technique (Young et al., 2015). In this intervention, the teacher and student sit side-by-side reading a passage of text aloud together, in a form of assisted reading. The teacher reads slightly ahead, into the left ear of the student using texts that are approximately two levels above the student's instructional reading level. The student reads aloud with the teacher and will mimic the teacher's prosodic, fluent reading. Heckelman is not the creator of the NIM, but found that methods used in speech and language therapy to address stuttering could be applied to help with oral reading difficulties (Heckelman, 1966; Young et al., 2015). In an early study, Heckelman (1969) reported an average gain in reading proficiency of two grade levels, for 24 disfluent readers receiving the NIM treatment over a period of six weeks.

Very few studies examining the NIM have been conducted over the past decade. Flood et al. (2005), tested the effectiveness of the NIM in their version of the intervention, titled the Neurological Impress Method Plus (NIM Plus), with researchers including a comprehension component. This study included 20 participants reading below grade level in grades three-six. Each student was paired with a student teacher, trained in NIM Plus, and was given this intervention over a period of five weeks. The intervention was delivered four days a week with each session lasting 10 minutes. Researchers reported a significant increase in oral reading fluency and reading comprehension for all students (Flood et al., 2005). The NIM intervention was also implemented with two third-grade students struggling with oral reading fluency for a period of 10 weeks, with researchers reporting over a year's growth in reading proficiency (Mohr, Dixon, & Young, 2012). Young et al. (2015) reintroduced this very promising intervention and called it, Reading Together, a combination of the NIM and repeated reading. In this quasi-experimental study, the sample included 52 students in grades three-five, who had failed the state's standardized assessment in the previous year. From this sample, 29 students were selected for treatment and compared against a control group, receiving instruction as usual. The treatment consisted of the one-to-one NIM intervention using volunteer

tutors for 30 minutes a day for a period of one month. Researchers reported statistically significant increases in oral reading fluency and reading comprehension.

Addressing Potential Difficulties with Implementation of the NIM

Although research surfaced in 1980s regarding the NIM, it is a largely forgotten intervention in all educational circles. One possible reason is that the NIM requires a one-to-one ratio between teacher and student. It is also possible that educators simply aren't aware of the benefits of this type of reading intervention although three common strategies are thought to have evolved from the NIM: assisted reading, listen-while-reading, and paired reading (Anderson, 1981; Rasinski & Young, 2014).

Although NIM is relatively easy to learn and inexpensive since it does not require specific tools, technology, or additional instructional materials, still, one-to-one interventions can be difficult to implement. However, studies show people other than teachers can be trained to provide this intervention. Young et al. (2015), reported success using volunteer tutors to deliver this intervention. Flood et al. (2005), discussed the possibility of training proficient students as peer tutors. It may be possible, through the use of software or podcasts, to use technology to provide struggling students with this type of assisted reading strategy (Rasinski & Young, 2014).

NIM in Action

Recently, author one implemented NIM in a fifth-grade classroom in an effort to explore the following question: What are the experiences of tutors and classroom teachers providing the NIM intervention in a fifth-grade classroom for a period of five weeks? The first author of this paper, a former elementary school teacher, now a doctoral student, consulted with a fifth-grade teacher, referred to above by the pseudonym of Mrs. Smith. Mrs. Smith had concerns about students struggling with oral reading fluency. We studied the implementation of NIM using a qualitative approach that employed a phenomenological research design (Cresswell, 2009); our purpose was to explore the potential of NIM, as experienced through the lived experiences of the participating teacher and volunteer tutors.

For the purpose of this qualitative research study, students scoring below the district's grade level benchmark in oral reading fluency rate were considered disfluent. Oral reading fluency rate was measured as WCPM and collected by the classroom teacher using curriculum-based assessments. The teacher selected six disfluent students, three female and three male, to receive the NIM intervention. All

students were identified as performing below grade level through district created base-line assessments and were receiving tier two interventions, addressing primarily reading comprehension.

The author provided training on the NIM to three tutors who were currently tutoring in the teacher's classroom. The tutors consisted of a former reading coach, a former teacher, and a retired business owner who was once enrolled in teacher education courses but did not finish the program. All tutors had experience volunteering in the teacher's classroom for at least two years, mainly assisting in reading assessment and data collection. For example, tutors often assessed and recorded weekly oral reading fluency rates. One tutor also worked with a small group of students in a weekly book club. The training included a description of the NIM, the purpose of the intervention, explanations, and intervention demonstration using the step-by-step guidelines provided in Table 1. Each tutor took turns demonstrating the intervention during the training and received feedback from the first author.

For a period of five weeks, the tutors implemented the NIM during the core reading block; they used leveled readers, approximately two levels above the students' instructional level. The leveled readers were selected by the first author using instructional reading levels provided by the teacher. Tutors worked one-on-one with the students using the NIM, with each session lasting about fifteen minutes. The sessions took place at a teacher table positioned in the side of the classroom while the teacher continued with whole group instruction.

During the five weeks of the NIM intervention, the first author met with two of the tutors and the classroom teacher on two occasions. They were asked to share overall impressions of the experience through an informal interview with the first author. They were also asked to share any concerns. The meetings took place in the classroom while students were out of the room. The tutors and the classroom teacher reported that the intervention was easy to learn and implement within the classroom without interrupting regular instruction. In the beginning of the five-week period, each tutor came in one day a week and worked with each of the six students, providing the intervention for about fifteen minutes per student. After about three weeks, the six students worked with only two of the tutors. The first author observed two of the tutors and provided feedback as needed using the step-by-step guidelines in Table 1. In addition, the first author attempted to observe the third tutor, however the tutor was not available due to illness.

The tutors reported some organizational challenges.

Since each student worked with different tutors, the tutors did not always know where to start in the text at the beginning of each session. The first author and classroom teacher created a chart that allowed tutors to record the students' placement in the text at the end of each session. There was still some confusion, but the tutors found that students generally remembered where to begin at each session. This specific challenge could be minimized by assigning each student to a specific tutor. The other challenge reported occurred around the holidays, with tutors unable to come in consistently and other changes in class schedule.

The classroom teacher reported that according to curriculum-based weekly fluency assessments, students improved in oral reading fluency rate measured as WCPM. The teacher and tutors reported an observable improvement in prosody, with students mimicking the tutors' phrasing and expression during the intervention. The most notable change was the improvement in the students' self-confidence in their oral reading ability during the intervention, possibly resulting from reduction in anxiety related to oral reading. In the beginning, some tutors stated that several students were reluctant to read aloud and appeared very anxious. At the end of the five weeks, the classroom teacher reported that students were visibly less anxious when reading aloud. The tutors and the teacher stated that students found it easier to read aloud after participating in the intervention.

Limitations to this exploratory study include a lack of systematic data collection, self-reports, small sample size, and duration of intervention. Although there are several methodological limitations associated with this study on NIM in action, this example of the NIM use highlights how easy it is to implement in a classroom setting, as well as the potential of NIM for supporting the development of students' oral reading fluency.

Table 1
Step by Step Protocol for Implementation:
Neurological Impress Method (adapted from Flood et al., 2005; Young et al., 2015; Young et al., 2016)

- 1 The teacher selects a text approximately two levels above the student's instructional level. If the text seems too easy or too challenging, the teacher may adjust the reading level of the text.
- 2 The teacher and student sit side by side to enable the teacher to read the text into the student's left ear.
- 3 Both the teacher and student track print as they read, either from identical copies of the same text or from one copy of the text. If reading from

the same copy, the student's finger should be placed on the teacher's finger as they track print.

- 4 Both the teacher and student should move their finger as they read to ensure tracking of print.
- 5 The teacher reads slightly ahead of the student. The teacher will need to adjust his or her pace to match the student's pace throughout each reading.
- 6 The teacher models fluent reading, using expressive phrasing, chunking of text, and stopping at punctuation, while the student reads along.
- 7 The student, independently, rereads the text aloud once, in a repeated reading format.
- 8 At the end of each session, the student retells or summarizes the reading to the teacher.

Conclusion

Teachers need access to high impact instruction in foundational literacy or struggling students may find it difficult to comprehend texts at a critical level. When students begin to struggle with foundational reading skills, educators need to find the best interventions to support struggling readers. When a child does not master content, it is ineffective to repeat the same practices in an effort to provide an intervention (Anderson, 1981). Students struggling with disfluent oral reading, who have not made sufficient progress through small group targeted instruction, could benefit from the one-to-one oral fluency intervention, the NIM.

Fluency deserves more attention. Students are struggling and as the 2015 NAEP results showed, the majority of 4th and 8th grade students are not reading at a proficient level. Students struggling to achieve fluent oral reading may be at risk for poor reading comprehension, (NRP, 2000; Valencia & Buly, 2004) as fluency is a contributing factor in poor reading achievement. Fluency isn't all that is needed to create good reading comprehension, but it is an essential piece of the puzzle (Rasinski, 2016).

Non-proficient readers need effective interventions to support the level of improvement needed to master CCSS (Shanahan, 2012; Rasinski, 2016). Educators are urged to examine current practices to ensure students are receiving evidence-based, targeted instruction. Our situated implementation of the NIM provided us with positive results, although our

implementation had several methodological limitations that prevent us from making any generalizations to other contexts. At the same time, we are excited about the NIM method. Existing research on the NIM has also shown the potential of the method for developing students' prosody (Rasinski & Young, 2014). Although the NIM is not a quick fix for all students' reading fluency challenges, it is a promising method for facilitating fluency development with struggling readers. While struggling readers should still receive comprehensive interventions, the NIM has the potential to provide additional support to students struggling with disfluent reading. The NIM is extremely easy to learn, does not require specific equipment or materials, and can be implemented by classroom and exceptional education teachers, reading interventionists, paraprofessionals, volunteer tutors, as well as parents who can be easily trained in this method (Anderson, 1981; Rasinski & Young, 2014; Young et al., 2016).

In the last decade, there have been very few studies exploring the effect of the NIM on students' oral reading fluency and reading comprehension. There is a need for more current research to determine the impact of this intervention on disfluent readers. Several questions remain regarding the NIM as a one-to-one reading fluency intervention. For example, could the NIM effectively increase students' oral reading fluency if implemented in a small group of three students as opposed to the one-to-one format? This could create a greater impact as many students face similar reading struggles similar to those described in the case of Sophia. Also, given the recent attention to critical literacy and close reading, could a more effective approach to the use of NIM include a comprehension component such as Flood et al., (2005) describe in the intervention, the NIM Plus? Further research is needed on the role of the NIM in facilitating students' reading fluency. In our view, existing research on the NIM provides some evidence for giving it another chance for one-on-one reading fluency interventions.

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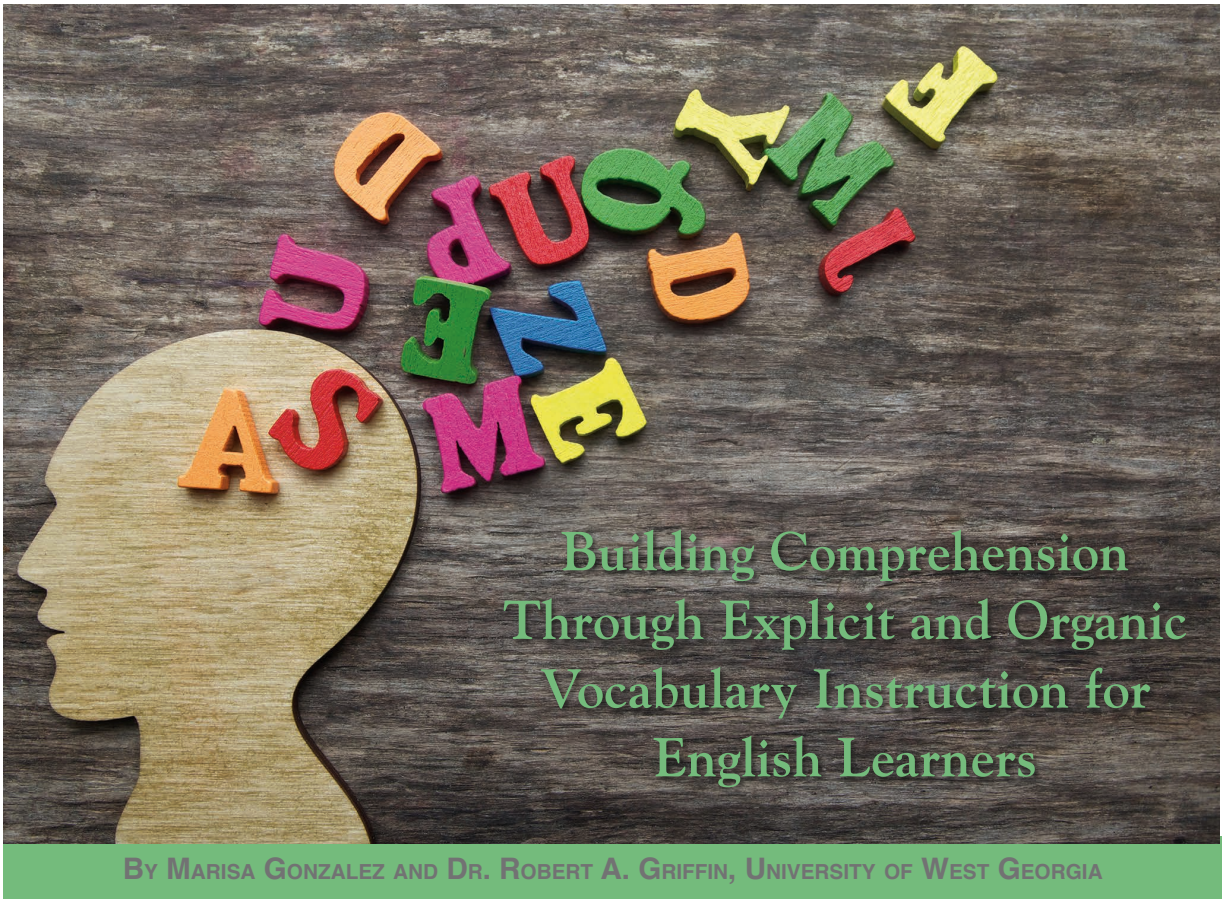
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Building Comprehension Through Explicit and Organic Vocabulary Instruction for English Learners

BY MARISA GONZALEZ AND DR. ROBERT A. GRIFFIN, UNIVERSITY OF WEST GEORGIA

Abstract

This article closely examines the relationship between vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension, specifically for English learners. The authors first set out to identify the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and comprehension. Research-based instructional strategies are then described with discussion centering on how these strategies specifically benefit English learners. Central to the thesis is that a reader must be able to decode words and assign meaning to those words with little to no effort to fully engage in and comprehend any type of text. Due to the language barrier, some English learners have a particularly difficult time decoding and assigning meaning to words. The research presented here supports the integration of reading strategies that can be used to build English learners' reading comprehension, both explicit vocabulary instruction combined with organic, student-centered language learning. Some of the strategies discussed include daily interactive read aloud, audio recordings of students reading, whole group shared reading experiences, and direct and explicit vocabulary instruction.

Growing diversity throughout recent decades in American education has resulted in large populations

of English learners (ELs) in contemporary classrooms. As a result, educators must ask themselves a critical burning question: *What are the most pressing hurdles my ELs must overcome, and what best practices can be implemented in my classroom to help them comprehend grade-level texts?* This question encapsulates a wide range of teaching and learning possibilities which are relevant to the success of these students, and many of these possibilities begin with the successful acquisition of English vocabulary, not only for speaking purposes, but ultimately for the total comprehension of a wide variety of English-language texts. Thus, the purpose of this article is to explore how vocabulary acquisition relates to reading comprehension for ELs and what best practices teachers can use to enhance the English vocabularies of language-minority students in order to boost their total reading comprehension. Relevant theoretical grounding for this type of instruction is found within the constructs of automaticity and literacy processing, and various instructional practices such as explicit teaching of vocabulary, morphology instruction, and interactive read aloud will be discussed.

The complex process of reading requires multiple processes to occur simultaneously: decoding,

assigning meaning to words, and comprehending the text. Decoding and assigning meaning to words need to be done with little or no effort to enhance comprehension. Assigning meaning to words is certainly part of the comprehension process, but the speed at which one assigns meaning is where comprehension can potentially break down for some English learners. For English learners, this automatic approach to reading is complicated. As students from non-English-speaking cultures, ELs often have personal experiences and background knowledge that differ from native English speakers. Decoding unfamiliar vocabulary is a significant obstacle some English learners must overcome before they can focus on comprehension.

The process of acquiring an additional language and becoming fluent English readers is a complex one for English learners. Providing all students, specifically English learners, with a classroom environment that is print-rich and that fosters reading and vocabulary growth is crucial. Educators should employ a combination of traditional and modern techniques to provide ELs with well-rounded literacy instruction, but explicit vocabulary instruction combined with organic, student-centered instruction remains crucial. Organic vocabulary instruction involves utilizing teachable moments to bring to the class's attention a word or term that, for example, a student asks about while reading or that one overhears on the intercom. Although there has been a push away from authentic, unplanned, organic, or implicit vocabulary instruction in recent years, using both methods to provide maximum exposure to vocabulary should be a best practice for all language teachers. Class time should be devoted to explicitly teaching decoding strategies and morphological derivations, but one should not neglect the unplanned, teachable moments that arise during the school day. Interactive read aloud, partner reading, and audio recordings of books can be used to foster expressive reading and build vocabulary.

Theoretical Frameworks

Understanding how vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension are linked is crucial because English learners face unique obstacles in these areas (Graves, Juel, Graves, & Dewitz, 2011). Theories of automaticity and literacy processing demonstrate the link between the ability of students to automatically decode and assign meaning to words and their reading comprehension, thus elucidating the critical issues ELs face as they overcome various hurdles toward acquiring vocabulary and improving their reading comprehension.

Automaticity

LaBerge and Samuel's (1974) theory of automaticity

essentially suggests that comprehension follows from automatically recognizing words as well as assigning meaning to words. This bottom-up theory posits that "learning to read progresses from learning parts of the language [letters] to understanding the whole text [meaning]" (Reutzel & Cooter, 2013, para. 1). Reading involves many processes occurring simultaneously—recalling words, connecting meaning to words, building sentences and paragraphs, and drawing upon prior knowledge to make text connections. Some of these processes must become automatic for readers to manage them all at once (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974), and when students' working memories are consumed with the challenges of basic decoding and other fundamental reading processes, less capacity remains for the purpose of comprehension (Kaufman, 2010). The more often students need to pause, decode, and work to determine meaning while reading a text, the less likely they will be able to fully engage in the reading and comprehend the text.

Literacy Processing

While observing students interacting authentically with texts over the course of a school year, Marie Clay (1982) found that learning to read is a continuous process of change and will likely look different from child to child. She confirmed that students' reading growth and learning as well as their ability to utilize more advanced literacy processes stemmed from ongoing exposure to increasingly complex texts over the course of their school careers (Doyle, 2013).

Over time and through guided interactions with texts, children leave the emergent reading phase and enter the conventional reading phase. Clay (1982) carefully considered the foundational processing and the cyclical process of reading to determine that "what on the surface looks like simple word-by-word reading . . . involves children in linking many things they know from different sources . . . to read a precise message" (Doyle, 2013, p. 644). Thus, to be a proficient reader, one must draw on a variety of strategies and knowledge to determine a text's meaning.

Convergence of Theories

Theories of automaticity and literacy processing converge to provide a relevant foundation for exploring the relationship between vocabulary acquisition and comprehension in ELs. Consider an individual of any age who is learning English: performing all of the aforementioned mental processes are an overwhelming task until at least one or many become automatic. ELs are often less capable during the language acquisition period than native speakers of automatically recognizing and decoding unfamiliar vocabulary (Lesaux, Kieffer, Kelley, & Harris, 2014). Thus, they are at a disadvantage in learning when

compared to their native-speaking peers because “they have yet to develop the rich and varied knowledge that many children internalize from growing up in a literate culture” (Graves et al., 2011, p. 412).

For students who have a strong literacy foundation in their native language, learning another language, typically English, is a much easier task. However, few ELs have an established literate culture in their own native language, so they essentially must begin anew when working toward English language acquisition. Because many ELs are distanced from their native cultures and language at an early age, neither their native language nor the English language is well developed (Bowman-Perrott, Herrera, & Murry, 2010).

Native English speakers acquire large English vocabularies from conversations, books, television, and cultural experiences. When native speakers encounter words in a text, they often can automatically recognize and assign meaning to those words. Due to the myriad of cognitive processes that must be mastered within second-language acquisition, ELs often cannot process information in their second languages at the same speed as in their native languages, thus slowing comprehension (Burns & Helman, 2009).

Selected Review of Literature

A review of relevant literature details the relationship between vocabulary acquisition and comprehension, with specific focus given to how English learners best acquire vocabulary. Factors inhibiting comprehension and research-based instructional techniques that can be utilized to build vocabulary acquisition and improve reading comprehension are also discussed. Central to this discussion are the importance of vocabulary knowledge, morphology instruction, and repeated reading to improve reading comprehension.

Vocabulary and Reading Linked

As founded extensively within relevant theoretical frameworks, learning to read is a complex endeavor. Students spend much of their time in the primary grades learning basic phonics skills and strategies to decode words (Graves et al., 2011). This work lays the foundation for text comprehension and paves the route for the comprehension of texts of increased complexity in the middle and upper grades (Lewis, Walpole, & McKenna, 2014). Because vocabulary acquisition and background knowledge help provide meaning and depth to texts, students’ comprehension improves as they acquire new vocabulary and learn new concepts (Graves et al., 2011; Hastings, 2016; Lewis et al., 2014). Simply put, the more words readers understand when reading a text, the easier it will be for them to comprehend the text (Lewis et al.,

2014; Nagy, 2005). As such, “vocabulary occupies an important middle ground in learning to read” (National Reading Panel, 2008, para. 5).

Limited Vocabularies of English Learners

While it is well-established that reading achievement is built on vocabulary acquisition, often, English learners know far fewer English words than their monolingual peers. Beck and McKeown (1991), for example, highlight the gap in vocabulary mastery, citing that native English speakers master approximately 5,000 words by the end of first grade and 50,000 words when they graduate from high school. On average, the English vocabularies of language-minority students are but a fraction of the working vocabularies of native English speakers (Duncan & Paradis, 2016; Filippini, Gerber, & Leafstedt, 2012; Lesaux et al., 2014). These gaps are particularly problematic when Matthew effects in literacy—ideally, the notion of continually-widening knowledge gaps—are considered (Stanovich, 1986). Such are the bases for improved teaching and learning endeavors targeted specifically at improving the vocabularies of ELs.

Because their vocabularies may be limited, the process of learning to read in English proves to be quite challenging for ELs. Many factors influence the vocabulary acquisition of English learners, including the prior knowledge they have gathered from personal experiences (Richgels, 1982; Sheridan, 1981), their access to English books at home, and the frequency of their exposure to written and oral English (Graves et al., 2011; Griffin, 2016). Educators, therefore, should consider how best to deliver academic content to English learners to make vocabulary acquisition and reading more enjoyable (Lesaux et al., 2014). Focusing on designing curriculum and strategies to enhance the vocabulary development of English learners in an effort to bridge existing achievement gaps between English learners and native speakers is an excellent place to start (Gibson, 2016).

Furthermore, developing the vocabularies of English learners in the primary grades to prepare them for the higher conceptual loads of the upper grades is crucial (Hendrix & Griffin, 2017; Nagy, 2005; Nagy, Berninger, & Abbott, 2006). Rich and varied learning strategies—e.g., explicitly teaching word-learning techniques or building word consciousness—are necessary to effectively foster and enhance the vocabularies of English learners (Hendrix & Griffin, 2017; Lesaux et al., 2014; Pacheco & Goodwin, 2013). Rich, extensive vocabularies assist students in becoming successful long-term readers and writers by allowing them to determine meanings of words and phrases with ease and in using precise language in their own writing and reading. English learners, by nature of the language-

learning process, need additional targeted support in vocabulary acquisition (Graves et al., 2011). Teachers of English learners, therefore, should rely on a variety of researched-based strategies to develop the vocabularies of their language-minority students (Gibson, 2016).

When explicit teaching of vocabulary and vocabulary strategies are implemented in the instruction of ELs, it is critical to ensure that these explicitly-taught fundamentals of language usage be translated into authentic transfer through student support and guidance (Hendrix & Griffin, 2017). Many websites and teacher manuals provide resources for traditional skill-and-drill practices with the hope that if words are heard and seen enough times, students will eventually commit them to memory. However, this type of explicit instruction does not lead to application in broader contexts; it must be ongoing and integrated with other literacy initiatives within the classroom (Nagy, 2005). When explicit vocabulary instruction is combined with student-centered instruction, which has been shown to have a positive effect on many children's learning (Davis, 2010; Roskos & Neuman, 2014), students tend to be more engaged in the learning process as a whole (Davis, 2010). Combining student-centered approaches, such as interactive read aloud, with explicit instruction in vocabulary acquisition proves to be particularly useful for ELs (Roskos & Neuman, 2014).

Factors Inhibiting Text Comprehension

For ELs, multiple factors contribute to difficulty with text comprehension. Some of these factors include, but are not limited to, lack of English vocabulary and gaps in fluency and prosody. The following sections will examine these inhibiting factors more closely.

Some ELs, especially those from home environments with little or no literacy in their first languages, sometimes struggle to comprehend text because of their limited vocabularies. Automaticity is limited because they can only adequately attend to one task at a time (Graves et al., 2011). Word attack skills must be explicitly taught to make up for this deficiency (Hendrix & Griffin, 2017). Graves et al. (2011) maintain that "having a small vocabulary is a very serious detriment to success in reading" (p. 254). Lower vocabulary acquisition is a major hurdle to overcome for students whose native language is not English.

Recent research highlights how vocabulary acquisition influences comprehension and also points to inadequate morphology instruction as a contributing factor of poorer comprehension. Kieffer and Lesaux (2007) focused on upper elementary students' morphological awareness. One of their key findings

was that "morphological awareness predicts reading comprehension" in English learners (Kieffer & Lesaux, 2007, p. 783). Students' morphological awareness contributed to both their knowledge of individual words and their overall reading comprehension.

Not only do many English learners have limited vocabularies, but they also receive limited morphology instruction, making it difficult for them to determine word meanings on their own based on roots, prefixes, or suffixes. Therefore, educators should recognize that teaching basic vocabulary should be in conjunction with providing consistent morphology instruction. Kieffer and Lesaux's (2007) study should be extended to determine what conditions maximize this type of explicit vocabulary teaching and provide concrete evidence to determine specific morphological instructional techniques that yield positive results. Morphological awareness is emphasized in the upper elementary grades, but it is a skill that should be gradually reinforced throughout students' school years (Hendrix & Griffin, 2017; Kieffer & Lesaux, 2007).

Instructional Techniques to Build Vocabulary

Vocabulary acquisition is critical in improving text comprehension (Lesaux et al., 2014). Research-based instructional strategies to implement in the classroom are also important to consider when designing curriculum. Some studies encourage explicit and systematic vocabulary instruction (Filippini et al., 2012; Lesaux et al., 2014), while others imply that enriching daily instruction with student-centered activities, such as poetry readings, repeated readings, and Readers Theater, helps foster vocabulary growth (Tsou, 2011; Young & Nageldinger, 2014).

Providing students with only phonological awareness instruction in the primary grades is not sufficient. ELs make greater strides in reading when they are taught vocabulary in an explicit manner, consistently and with fidelity (Hendrix & Griffin, 2017; Lesaux et al., 2014). Filippini et al. (2012), in an empirical study employing repeated measures of literacy intervention treatment among several experimental groups composed of elementary students (including 66 students with limited English proficiency), concluded that direct, targeted interventions added to vocabulary instruction provided substantial literacy growth among the lowest-performing students. Interventions included direct phonics instruction, semantic feature analysis among synonymous vocabulary, and direct morpheme instruction (Filippini et al., 2012). Additionally, as a result, 70% of students receiving interventions in the study showed larger gains in reading comprehension than their peers who did not receive explicit instruction (Filippini et al., 2012). These interventions addressed the notion that ELs sometimes lack the same cultural

experiences as native English speakers, making the contextualization of vocabulary words challenging (Filippini et al., 2012). Explicit instruction of this sort in school is especially important for students who lack rich language experiences in English at home (Griffin, 2016).

While targeted vocabulary instruction results in growth for ELs, this growth neither negates nor replaces the growth that organic language experiences with native speakers provide. As previously stated, vocabulary interventions are powerful, but they must supplement authentic uses of language along the road to mastery. ELs make greater gains when they are exposed to organic language-learning experiences (Lesaux et al., 2014), but these experiences may be scaffolded and created for ELs within the classroom setting. Language-minority students learn a great deal about language through interactions with native-speaking peers. As student-centered instructional approaches, Readers Theater and poetry readings have been shown to improve reading and writing skills (Tsou, 2011; Young & Nageldinger, 2014). Tsou (2011) found that the vocabulary and writing skills of Taiwanese fifth graders who received instruction through Readers Theater as opposed to traditional skill-and-drill exercises improved significantly. Giving students opportunities to reread accessible texts multiple times and to kinesthetically interact with texts increases their ability to assign meaning to words through context clues. Thus, interactions with language in authentic contexts leads ELs to greater synthesis of language as a whole.

Using a similar approach to instruction, a third-grade teacher used poetry to target automatic word recognition skills and comprehension with her English learners (Wilfong, 2015). She found that giving English learners multiple opportunities to read poetry aloud to their peers, teachers, and family members helped strengthen their fluency and word recognition skills. Once per week for 12 consecutive weeks, students worked with a trained professional from The Poetry Academy. The teacher modeled reading poems with fluency before the students independently conducted repeated readings among themselves and then read the poems to their family members at home. Finally, they performed the poetry recitations for the class after a week of practice.

Similar to Tsou (2011), Wilfong (2015) found that students almost doubled their scores from pre- to post-tests regarding fluency and automatic word decoding. The short stanzas in poetry made reading manageable and achievable. LaBerge and Samuels (1974) indicated that the first step to comprehension is being able to attack words. Once readers master

that skill, then they can focus on assigning meaning to those words (Wilfong, 2015). The research on Readers Theater and poetry reveals that vocabulary growth naturally follows one's growth in decoding and automatic word recognition (Tsou, 2011; Wilfong, 2015).

While considering the best instructional approaches for English learners, teachers must first determine the factors that are contributing to their struggle to comprehend texts. From there, educators must rely on research-based practices to implement strategies in the classroom in order to support the diverse needs of English learners. The research discussed here posits that limited vocabulary is one of the predominant reasons English learners have difficulty comprehending texts.

Instructional Implications

The correlation between vocabulary knowledge, morphological instruction, and reading comprehension for English learners is clear. Isolating concrete instructional strategies that yield academic growth is imperative. When addressing vocabulary and morphology instruction with young English learners, various methods can be employed in the classroom. Simple read alouds to bolster English learners' vocabulary and demonstrate fluent reading are appropriate, or technological tools can be utilized to build vocabulary and morphology awareness, such as using voice recordings and student support websites (Griffin, Martinez, & Martin, 2014).

Teachers would be wise to incorporate daily read aloud, shared reading and writing, and word walls to maximize the rate at which students can recall words and their meanings. Additionally, English learners would benefit from having a reading partner who is a native English speaker. This will give them additional opportunities to hear how books should be read fluently and with expression in the English language (Graves et al., 2011).

Vocabulary Flashcards

Preserving small group time for direct and explicit vocabulary instruction is a research proven method to reinforce language skills with ELs (Filippini et al., 2012; Lesaux et al., 2014). Utilizing illustrated flashcards, providing synonyms and antonyms, and generating examples are necessary components of effective vocabulary instruction. As previously mentioned, strategies related to direct phonics instruction can be used in conjunction with read alouds and explicit modeling of decoding skills and phonological awareness to promote gains in reading comprehension. Since many English learners have difficulty interpreting, visualizing, and making meaning,

it is helpful for them to be able to see and create concrete examples in a systematic manner, and in lessons that are implemented consistently (Filippini et al., 2012).

Read Alouds

While a multitude of strategies exist to support English learners' vocabulary growth, traditional teacher-led read alouds are an effective way to teach vocabulary. While many English learners lack the experience and background knowledge necessary to fully engage in reading, providing them with an opportunity to hear fluent reading while developing vital listening comprehension and vocabulary development skills is beneficial (Graves et al., 2011).

An ever-widening gap between middle-class students' vocabularies and the vocabularies of students in poverty exists. Students who come from families where vocabulary-rich conversations are part of their everyday lives tend to perform better in reading (Hart & Risley, 1995). Teachers can, to some extent, make up for the lack of language-rich home environments by facilitating meaningful discussions in the classroom. These discussions can be done through interactive oral reading. Teachers select a text to read aloud to the whole class, demonstrating fluency and expression. The book is read once without any pauses or interruptions. Then, the teacher reads the book again, this time stopping to direct students' attention to seven or eight vocabulary words, providing a brief definition and adding to a vocabulary chart for students to reference. Rereading the text a third and fourth time, after teaching vocabulary, helps students to absorb more information without being bogged down by unfamiliar text (Graves et al., 2011; Wilfong, 2015).

The goal behind interactive read alouds and vocabulary development is that it will transfer into students' ability to "build knowledge networks—connections between concepts that are meaningful and enduring in their longer-term memory and are primary in comprehension development" (Roskos & Neuman, 2014, p. 508). Over time, automaticity will be fostered through repeated readings and exposure to new vocabulary words, thus building a solid foundation for comprehension.

Recorded Readings

All students, especially English learners, strongly benefit from the integration of audio recorders in the classroom. Teachers can provide pre-recorded readings of books for students to listen to and follow along, allowing them exposure to fluent and expressive reading. English learners often spend such a significant amount of time decoding that they have

limited mental energy left to find meaning in a text. Modeling reading for them not only boosts vocabulary but also allows for the meaning-making process to occur more automatically. Additionally, a teacher can have an audio recorder available at literacy stations for students to record themselves reading a book of their choice. When students are able to listen to themselves read, they can often catch their mistakes and self-correct, ideally reading more fluently and expressively during repeated readings (Graves et al., 2011). Recorded readings also offer students who may be more timid and less confident readers a chance to engage and participate in a more private and risk-free setting. With recorded readings, ELs do not have the added stress of reading in front of peers and the fear of making mistakes.

Image Galleries

An additional way to support English learners with vocabulary acquisition is to accompany new vocabulary words with images from the Internet. Having an iPad or computer handy in small groups, or a Smart Board for whole groups, provides students with an extra layer of support for unfamiliar words. Google Images, for example, is an excellent tool for showcasing various illustrations for a given vocabulary word (Figure 1). When students can envision those new words, they can more fully engage in the reading process, and comprehending the text becomes more automatic without having to waste mental stamina on assigning meaning to unfamiliar words (Graves et al., 2011). This is particularly useful—and, truly, imperative—for ELs in the middle and upper grades who are not only faced with automaticity and mastery of common vocabulary, but also the content-specific vocabulary that permeates most of their course loads and advanced nonfiction texts (Lewis et al., 2014).

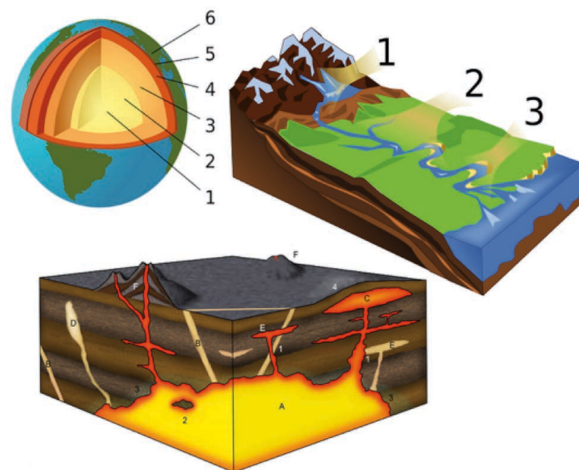


Figure 1. Sample Google images when conducting search for "geology." In public domain.

Document Cameras

Finally, a handy technological tool teachers should take advantage of in their classrooms is a document camera. During interactive read-alouds, students do not necessarily need to see any text in order to participate. However, during a shared reading or writing lesson, a document camera can be used to display text on a larger screen for students to follow along.

Conclusion

The central issue for English learners is evident: automaticity and reading comprehension cannot be achieved with a limited vocabulary. Language-minority students will benefit if vocabulary development is targeted systematically in the primary grades in order to advance them before school content becomes much more intense and complex. A sense of urgency is appropriate for teachers to support their English learners in literacy instruction in order to promote vocabulary growth, thus leading to successful comprehension. In short, the development of a wide vocabulary and morphological knowledge promotes automaticity and thus comprehension and is essential for reading achievement in the upper grades.

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Children's Literature to Develop Awareness and Advocacy for Social Justice

BY DR. KATIE KELLY AND DR. LINDSAY YEARTA



Abstract

Children's literature can enhance readers' understandings of themselves and others in an increasingly diverse world. This article examines the need for inclusion and discussion of diverse literature in the classroom. Specifically, the authors describe a partnership between fifth graders and preservice teachers to digitally discuss the book, *A Long Walk to Water* (Park, 2010) using a student-friendly blog. Both groups broadened their worldview and the need for social justice through the reading and blogging about the selected literature. The authors share classroom implications and extensions to advocate for social action. Projects such as the one described in this article remind teachers and children that common bonds of humanity can build empathy, unite us all, and inspire us to take action for social justice.

Children's literature enhances students' understanding of inequities that persist at the national and global

level and can foster advocacy for social justice (Martin & Smolen, 2010). Literature opens the door to the outside world as it has the power to "put a human face on sociopolitical circumstances" (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, p. 262). From resettling Syrian refugees to the fight to stop the Dakota Pipeline, opportunities for students to engage in social justice issues are plentiful. However, awareness of issues is a prerequisite to engaging students in these discussions.

This article describes a blogging partnership between fifth graders and preservice teachers to discuss the book, *A Long Walk to Water*, by Linda Sue Park (2010). Both Katie's preservice teachers and Lindsay's fifth graders increased their awareness of social issues related to access to clean water, education, and war. This moving novel was selected as shared literature for several reasons. As a high-interest dual narrative based on a true story, it fostered rich discussions between the elementary students and preservice

teachers involved in the project. The book shares the compelling stories of two individuals in South Sudan whose lives later intertwine in an inspiring way. The novel is based on the true story of Salva Dut, a Sudanese Lost Boy who was forced to leave his home and family during the civil war. Salva traveled by foot across several countries to find refuge and safety from his war-torn country. The fictional story of Nya tells about the young village girl who spends most of her day walking to seek and provide water for her family. This story of hope for two determined survivors brings awareness to modern-day conflict around the world including the scarcity of water, which can so easily be taken for granted.

The Need for Diverse Literature

As our world continues to flatten (Friedman, 2007) and we become more connected, the need to learn about other cultures and ways of being is a prerequisite for becoming informed, participatory global citizens. One way to enhance students' views of themselves and the world around them is with use of literature (Brinson, 2012).

Children's literature can have powerful effects on young children's self-concepts and worldviews (Hughes-Hassell, Barkley & Koehler, 2009; Jackson & Boutte, 2009; Sims, 1982). Specifically, literature can act as a window, allowing students to get a peek into another culture's way of being or as a mirror, allowing student access to deeper reflection of his or her own culture (Bishop, 1990; Brinson, 2012). When diverse literature is used as a window, it can shine a light on underrepresented groups to become more visible and in doing so, enable readers to develop empathy and challenge existing stereotypes.

Unfortunately, a small percentage of published books are written by or about cultures beyond that of dominant groups. According to the Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC) at the University of Wisconsin, of the 3,700 books published in 2017, 462 were written by or about African/African Americans and 332 by or about Latinos/Latinas. Souto-Manning (2013) notes that characters in books remain predominantly White, English speaking and represent heteronormative families. Furthermore, Koss (2015) analyzed 455 books and determined that only 36 depicted culturally specific characters as having a central role in the story. With inadequate representation of diversity in children's literature, there is an implicit assumption that the dominant culture is more valued and represents status quo (Rasinski & Padak, 1990). Therefore, it is essential that more diverse children's literature is incorporated into the classroom to avoid a narrow, one-dimensional view of the world (Anaya, 1992).

Literature that represents different ways of being can develop students' awareness and appreciation for diverse populations and encourages children to live harmoniously in an increasingly pluralistic society (Nilsson, 2005). "Stories (both fictional and factual) help humans to organize experiences, to make sense of them, and to learn from them" (Lehman, Freeman, & Scharer, 2010, p. 19). They connect us as humans by deepening our understanding of others and exploring our commonalities. Therefore, it is essential that teachers seek out and incorporate quality children's literature that includes diverse characters and situations in order to help all children feel valued (Koss, 2015, p. 39).

There are numerous sources available to help teachers find more diverse literature. With a social media campaign known as #WeNeedDiverseBooks, teachers can easily find online discussions and book suggestions related to diversity. We Need Diverse Books™ is a grassroots organization that advocates for the production and promotion of children's literature that reflects and respects the lives of all individuals. Furthermore, several book awards including the Coretta Scott King Award, the Pura Belpré Award, and the Arab-American Book Award, offer educators lists of recommended children's books to infuse diversity in the classroom setting. Integrating diverse literature in the classroom is a crucial first step in providing students with a foundational understanding of global diversity. Another powerful approach to fostering deeper understanding of text and the world around us is through connecting with a wider audience through digital discussion.

Digital Discussion of Diverse Literature

To move beyond exposure to diversity in children's literature and provide more opportunities for literature to act as a conduit for learning about ourselves and others, teachers can facilitate discussion and provide guidance to deepen students' understanding of the world. Discussion of diversity can be promoted through multicultural literature as children identify with their own culture as well as the cultures of others (Colby & Lyon, 2004; Koss, 2015).

While it is important to engage students in discussions about diversity using literature as a springboard, learning is invariably enhanced when students are able to interact with and hold conversations with students of other cultures and backgrounds. In fact, International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) Standards for Students (2016) suggest the need for students to be global collaborators. The use of digital tools connects learners from different backgrounds and cultures and to explore local and global issues and explore possible solutions (ISTE Standards, 2016).

Blogging is one type of digital platform that allows students to communicate with an authentic audience beyond the four walls of the classroom (Merchant, 2005; Stover & Yearta, 2017; Yearta, Stover, & Sease, 2015). Blogs can be used for literary purposes as students discuss and synthesize literature, share resources, and communicate with a wider audience (Zawilinski, 2009). Additionally, students can use blogs in content areas, to compose reflections, to respond to literature, to journal about mathematical processes, as well as many other possibilities (Stover, Yearta & Harris, 2016).

Digital Discussion of *A Long Walk to Water*

This section describes the blogging partnership between fifth graders and college students enrolled in a teacher education program to discuss the novel, *A Long Walk to Water* (Park, 2010). The fifth-grade students were part of an inclusion class in a suburban school located in the southeastern portion of the United States. Of the 21 fifth-grade participants, nine were male and twelve were female. Nine students were White, eleven were African American, and one student was Hispanic. The nine, white, female preservice teachers were enrolled in a literacy methods course in a small, private liberal arts university in the southeastern portion of the United States.

Two to three fifth graders were paired with one of the preservice teachers to communicate about the literature through a minimum of eight blog posts and responses. The preservice teachers elicited online dialogue through probing and open-ended questions to increase student engagement and comprehension of the text in an individualized manner.

Kidblog (www.kidblog.org) was used as the blogging platform for the fifth graders and the preservice teachers although the ideas presented here can be used with any student-friendly blogging site. Both sets of participants began by creating an “All about Me” post to familiarize themselves with the blogging features. Allowing students to begin with a post as a means of introduction provided them with an opportunity to gain experience with aspects of the blog including how to select a font and background, embed links, images, and videos, and comment to classmates (Yearta, Stover, & Sease, 2015). Additionally, this initial post provided the reading buddies with a way to break the ice and gain comfort with communicating with someone new before delving into the content of the book.

Using the blog as a discussion platform had several benefits. First, the fifth graders were accustomed to this type of technology. They had used the blog since the beginning of the year and were familiar with its

features. The fifth grade teacher maintained a blog as well, providing the students with a safe space to ask questions or comment on posts in class or from home. Before the blogging exchange began, the fifth graders blogged to share about books being read independently. Their posts varied from in-depth and regular to surface-level and infrequent. With communication between fifth graders and the preservice teachers as reading buddies, Lindsay began to notice that the posts became more focused, detailed, and dialogic in nature. While there were noted benefits for the elementary students (see the article, “Fifth Graders Blog with Preservice Teachers” published in *Reading Horizons*), the next section focuses on the lessons learned by the preservice teachers as blogging partners.

Lessons Learned

Prior to reading *A Long Walk to Water* and blogging with fifth graders, the preservice teachers indicated that they valued diversity but only demonstrated a surface-level understanding. They referenced holidays around the world as a ‘cute’ classroom activity and the need for understanding diversity for the purpose of travel. Many discussed their lack of knowledge and confidence about how to foster learning about diversity and social justice in the classroom. With limited previous experience, the preservice teachers desired to deepen their learning yet acknowledged that “attending to diversity and cultures is a challenge.”

Although viewed as a challenge, the preservice teachers examined ways to use children’s literature as a springboard to explore diversity in the classroom in more meaningful ways. Preservice teachers discussed how literature can create a safe space to explore the uncomfortable and the importance of students seeing themselves in the books they read. By participating in the blogging partnership to discuss the book *A Long Walk to Water*, preservice teachers observed how literature enhanced understanding of diversity and issues of inequality for themselves and the fifth graders with whom they blogged.

Literature with a focus on diversity acts as a catalyst to develop readers’ awareness of social issues such as inequality. In particular, *A Long Walk to Water* was “eye-opening” for many of the preservice teachers as they learned about the limited access to education and clean water in South Sudan. Reading this book increased participants’ awareness of their privilege and acted as a springboard for further conversation, research, and understanding about issues of inequality around the world. The preservice teachers learned the value in careful selection of literature that fifth graders can relate to. While the events in the story such as fleeing a war-torn country and walking to obtain clean

drinking water are strikingly different than the lives the fifth graders lead, the preservice teachers reflected that since the characters in the book were of similar age, it made it easier for the students to relate.

After reading and blogging about the book, *A Long Walk to Water* with fifth graders, the preservice teachers moved beyond their surface level view of diversity as a study of holidays around the world and for the purpose of travel. They realized the important role classroom teachers play in fostering awareness of injustice and inequality with students. One preservice teacher explained that “as teachers, it is our job to make sure that our students grow up to be responsible citizens... this includes being globally aware and having the desire to want to change the world for the better.” These preservice teachers now hold a broader perspective on diversity as an essential underpinning in the classroom to develop acceptance of others, build awareness of social inequities, and to foster action for social justice.

The preservice teachers learned about the value of using literature as a tool to develop understanding and to foster empathy and passion for social equality. One preservice teacher described the book as “a wonderful resource for teachers to expose their students to different cultures, societies, ideas, and economic disparities.” They discussed the importance of learning about other parts of the world so students can develop respect and an appreciation for global perspectives and cultures. In the words of one preservice teacher, “It is important that students see other groups and cultures and diversity so they can learn to cooperate and interact.” Acknowledgement of the importance of accepting others to coexist in a more peaceful world in connection with the book’s message of respecting and loving one another regardless of our differences was highlighted. One preservice teacher shared that “reading [the book] allows us... to move beyond the words hung from the pages and further into the depths of humanity. Through an increased awareness as global citizens, children can build empathy, understanding, and inspiration to help.” The book was a catalyst for potential change as noted in the following preservice teachers’ comments:

“The theme and story based on Salva Dut’s real life is inspirational and should urge people of any age to be more aware of the world they live in and push them to possibly even get involved with the hopes of providing clean water or education for villages of Sudan.”

“[The book] leads us to a realization that our world is bigger than where we live, and there are many different kinds of people... it motivates us to help these people, so that others around the world

have privileges and opportunities that we get.”

The use of literature allowed both sets of readers to develop global awareness to move beyond their narrow views of life through their own perspectives and privilege. Specifically, readers were shocked and saddened to learn about the current struggles for freedom and the lack of daily necessities such as clean drinking water in South Sudan. One preservice teacher explained, “Even in this modern world today, human beings don’t have an easy means of acquiring clean water.” Reading the book and engaging in conversations was instrumental in allowing the preservice teachers to see more clearly through the fog of their privilege. As one preservice teacher noted, “there are still places in the world struggling to get the basic necessities while we live in a country of opportunity and excess.” She continued, “[I] think the way I view education and [the book] has definitely allowed me to see how lucky I am to be living in a country where clean water is readily available.”

While the blogging partnership to discuss the book, *A Long Walk to Water* occurred prior to the water crisis in Flint, Michigan and the protest against the Dakota Pipeline, these events speak to the increasing importance of raising awareness of social justice issues for our students both abroad as well as in the United States and the possibility of using literature as a catalyst to begin important conversations about equality and access to water, a basic human need. The next section explores extensions to conversations about water as a human rights issue.

Extending Conversations about Water as a Human Rights Issue

Water is a basic human right. Water is a necessity for life. Yet, millions of people, in villages around the world, including many in South Sudan, lack access to clean, safe water. According to the Charity Water Organization, 663 million people worldwide live without clean water. Often, girls, like the fictional character of Nya in *A Long Walk to Water* and African born supermodel Georgie Badiel featured in the book, *The Water Princess* (Verde, 2016) bear the burden of walking miles to gather water, water that is dirty and full of disease, at the expense of attending school. Access to clean water leads to greater growth of crops for food, overall health and well-being, and ability to obtain an education especially for women and children.

Access to clean water is not only a problem in developing countries. Here in the United States, the people of Flint, Michigan as well as members of the Sioux Tribe in Standing Rock, North Dakota continue to struggle for their right to water. In 2014, Flint, Michigan, a city with a high poverty rate, changed its

water supply from Lake Huron to the Flint River in an effort to save money. However, this new water source was contaminated with lead which created a public health crisis. The polluted water with its yellowish color and foul taste contains high levels of lead, affecting people, pets, and plants. Many children have tested positive for lead in their blood which can lead to possible developmental delays, learning disabilities, and behavioral problems. President Obama declared a federal emergency and efforts to mitigate the effects have been underway. These efforts include providing water bottles and filters to residents as well as educating parents about healthy diets for children in order to counter the effects of the lead poisoning. However, the need for long term solutions remains as residents are still unable drink tap water without the use of a filter.

Over 1,000 miles away, concerns about pollution of air, water, and land as a result of the Dakota Access Oil Pipeline has led to protests at the construction site. The Standing Rock Sioux tribe aims to prevent the 1,100-mile-long pipeline that will carry half a million barrels of oil across four states daily from being built near their reservation in North Dakota. They are concerned about the contamination of their water supply and the threat to destroy sacred land and ancient burial sites. In order to protest actions and protect their land, a camp was established at the construction site. With the project nearly halfway finished, the federal government ordered a temporary cease to construction of the section north of Standing Rock. However, with the shifting power of a newly elected president, the future of the pipeline and the sacred land is again unknown.

While political shifts are inevitable in a democratic country, students and teachers do not have to remain uninformed and powerless. To raise awareness and encourage discussion and action, teachers can incorporate multiple text types including images, interviews, the novel *A Long Walk to Water*, the picture book *Water Princess*, and Dave Matthews' "Song for Billijo" (see YouTube) to raise awareness and increase interest in the water crises around the world. Lyrics (see Appendix) from the Dave Matthews' song depict the freezing temperatures at the camp in North Dakota as well as Standing Rock's threatened water sources.

Through examination of different types of nonfiction and fiction texts, students can engage in multiple discussions about the importance of access to clean water and begin to research ways to get involved to advocate for social justice. As students conduct research, they are encouraged to triangulate and synthesize sources and engage in ongoing class discussions as new understandings develop. The next

step is for students to get involved by writing for social justice. Students may have an outlet in mind before they begin to research, or the recipient may become clear as the students read and learn about the selected topic. Students can write letters or emails, or create infographics or videos. In fact, the options are endless.

Classroom Implications

While the blogging experience focused solely on discussions of the book, *A Long Walk to Water* (Park, 2012), triangulation of sources to examine issues related to water could span across the curriculum and deepen students' understanding of how this human rights issue not only affected the lives of Salva and Nya in South Sudan, but also people living right here in their home country of the United States. In this article, we share how preservice teachers developed a broader worldview as a result of the selected literature and the dialogic conversations via blogging. Although many of the preservice teachers had limited notions of diversity or experiences beyond family travel, they developed an appreciation for the role children's literature can play in enhancing their own understandings as well as the perspectives of their students. Although teachers may feel trepidation towards their own experiences or a lack of comfort with addressing issues of inequity with their students, exposure to children's literature can help both the teachers' and consequently students' understanding and views continue to evolve. Educators should not allow their lack of experience with or knowledge of others to prevent them from engaging students in thoughtful, reflective conversations to examine privilege and issues of social justice. Reading and discussion of quality literature is critical in helping readers of all ages develop a worldview and greater understanding for and appreciation of diversity which leads to greater empathy and desire to take action to help humankind.

With a greater awareness of global diversity, students can then move towards action for social justice. Specifically, students can become involved in service learning experiences in numerous ways. For instance, in this project, one of the fifth graders did some self-initiated research on the Internet to discover information about Salva's organization, Water for South Sudan. She found the website: <http://www.waterforsouthsudan.org/salvas-story/> and learned more about Salva's work to build wells in South Sudan in an effort to bring fresh water to the community. This led to engaging classroom discussions to brainstorm ways to get involved such as making donations, sponsoring the construction of a well, and informing others as a way to advocate for the cause. Separated by diverse cultural norms and experiences, as well as geographic distance great or small, projects such as

this help to flatten the world and inspire children to learn how common bonds of humanity can bring us together.

As students develop their sense of agency and become more engaged in social justice action, the possibilities are truly endless. In addition to researching Salva's organization, students can engage in a myriad of other research related projects. For example, they could research and bring awareness to the Dakota Pipeline protest, the water crisis in Flint, Michigan, or any number of social justice issues. To engage in meaningful writing experiences for real audiences, students could write lawmakers or create infographics to advertise for fundraisers for a number of causes. Projects can be ongoing and fluid as students develop interest in various topics and causes.

Intentional selection of literature to be more inclusive of diverse cultures and issues of social justice helps readers of all ages deepen their understanding of the larger world around them. As Bishop (1990) and Brinson (2012) reminds us, literature can serve as windows into other lived experiences. With increased reading of more diverse texts and multiple text types, students can enhance their understanding of others and their own privilege and ultimately develop increased empathy, tolerance, and an awareness of social injustices around the world. Reading and working with diverse literature in the classroom allows students to have a better understanding for other lived experiences and perspectives (Templeton & Gehsmann, 2014). Moving beyond awareness to action through research to foster change and action for social justice will help young students make this world a better place to live for all humankind.

Conclusion

As educators, we are constantly pondering ways to enhance learning opportunities for our students. In this blogging project, the preservice teachers read and discussed *A Long Walk to Water* (Park, 2012) with a group of fifth grade students. By providing the preservice teachers with an opportunity to read global literature and communicate with elementary students via the blog, both sets of participants developed new understandings. The preservice teachers began to develop global awareness and consequently realized the importance of incorporating diverse literature in the elementary classroom. Specifically, preservice teachers learned that purposefully selected literature can serve as a catalyst to help elementary students engage in conversations about diversity and equity. Moving beyond the classroom, preservice teachers also learned that literature can help elementary students think beyond their own experiences to develop a deeper understanding of global awareness.

Literature is powerful, and "as technology advances and opportunities for global communication expand, the value and importance of international children's books will continue to grow" (Lehman, Freeman, & Scharer, 2010, p. 19). We agree with Linda Sue Park (2015) who stated from the TedTalk she gave that while a book cannot save the world, "the young people who read them can." Reading provides a window into a variety of lived experiences and important social justice topics. When preservice teachers expand their repertoire of children's literature beyond the traditional canon to include more diverse books and learn about ways to engage students in meaningful discussion of literature including digitally mediated approaches, they will be better prepared for meeting the needs of today's diverse student population in an increasingly pluralistic world. The result may be that readers of all ages learn to embrace the common bonds of humanity and leverage empathy to take action for social justice.

Appendix: "Song for Billijo" by Dave Matthews

A cold wind blows over North Dakota

Billijo says, "This is my fire"

"Come warm yourself by my fire"

She said, "Come, my friend, warm your soul"

The river flows in North Dakota

Billijo says, "Oh, this is my water"

"Come quench your thirst in my river"

Billijo said, "Come, my friend, warm your soul"

She said, "You are not alone, not in North Dakota"

Billijo says, "This is my home"

She said, "Come warm yourself by my fire"

Billijo said, "Come drink your fill of this water"

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*Once you learn to read,
you will be forever free.*

—FREDERICK DOUGLASS



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Maximizing Learning: Embedding Phonological Awareness Throughout the Day

BY DR. SHAWNNA HELF, DR. LINDSAY YEARTA AND DR. KAVIN MING



Abstract

Phonological awareness encompasses three main subsets of skills: awareness of words, syllables, and sounds. These three skills work in concert to support students' reading development. By purposefully utilizing time in the classroom, teachers can embed phonological awareness activities during common transitions, thus maximizing students' exposure to early literacy skills. Through these deliberately planned activities, teachers can not only provide effective instruction, but they can ensure that throughout the school day, transitions run smoothly with fewer disruptions and off-task behaviors.

As Ms. Simpson (all names are pseudonyms) completed her read-aloud, she glanced at the clock and took note of the time. She clapped her hands in the first part of a well-known rhythmic pattern. Her 4K students, finishing the pattern, knew it was time to get quiet and line up to wash hands so that they could head to the cafeteria for lunch.

As students washed their hands and Mrs. Simpson ushered them to the line, several children were having their own conversations.

"I have an apple for lunch," Jade whispered to Kendra at the sink.

"Ewwwww! I hate apples!" Kendra shouted.

As Jade's face started to morph into what surely indicated an imminent tantrum, Ms. Simpson came up behind them and attempted to diffuse the situation. "Apples are delicious! I wonder if you can guess my

favorite fruit. I'm going to say the sounds slowly and I want you to put them together. Listen as I stretch the sounds, and then you will blend the sounds together to figure out what my favorite fruit is... Ready?"

The girls both looked at Mrs. Simpson and nodded. They were ready.

"Ok, my favorite fruit is a /p/ /l/ /u/ /m/."

"Oooh, plum!" Kendra quickly blended the sounds and smiled at her teacher.

As Kendra and Jade headed toward the line at the door, an idea came to Mrs. Simpson. She knew that due to transitions between activities, she was wasting at least five to ten minutes daily and needed every bit of instructional time that she could get. In this case not only was she able to distract these students from their squabble, she also provided them with phonemic awareness practice.

Preparing for lunch is one of many transitions that occur daily in early childhood settings. Put simply, transitions are the periods of time spent moving from one place or activity to another (Price & Nelson, 2011). Common transition times include restroom breaks, snack time, group time, recess, special area classes, arrival and dismissal. Some transitions occur quickly and frequently (e.g., lining up at the classroom door), while others take longer (e.g., restroom breaks). Taken together over the course of the day, this time adds up. Poorly managed transitions can result in the loss of instructional time and may also lead to unwanted student behaviors.

Within the recent past, there has been an increased emphasis on academic achievement. This has resulted in teachers being required to teach more, and students being required to process larger amounts of information (Lee, 2006). In order for students to successfully meet the academic demands of an ever growing curriculum, there must be sufficient time for learning (Amadio, 2004). Teachers must make deliberate efforts to increase students' engaged time, or their time-on-task. Engaged time is the amount of time that students spend directly involved in learning activities (Greenwood, 2002). When teachers effectively engage students in academic tasks, there is an increased likelihood that greater student learning will take place, which ultimately leads to higher levels of student achievement (Fisher et al., 2015; Johns, Crowley & Guetzloe, 2008). Research conducted on 30 schools nationwide that have demonstrated student growth have "made every minute count" by maximizing time on task (Sparks, 2011). There are many occurrences throughout the day that interfere with the amount of time that students can be fully engaged in learning activities. These can range from a 10-second intercom call to a 5-minute transition between classroom activities. According to Mastropieri and Scruggs (1994), transitions constitute one of the major sources of off-task behaviors. Transitions occur when students move from one activity to the next or from one location to the other. Throughout the school day, students are involved in multiple transition points, and these moments of off-task activities can have a compounding effect, leaving students with little time to be engaged in sustained learning (Johns, Crowley, & Guetzloe, 2008; Lee, 2006).

The purpose of this article is to encourage teachers to consider common transitions in their classroom schedule and begin viewing those periods of time as opportunities for learning. With thoughtful and purposeful planning, transitional time can serve to not only improve classroom management, but also as an opportunity to embed extra skill instruction in the school day. Specifically, we focus on a foundational reading skill, phonological awareness. We provide ideas for embedding phonological awareness instruction during transitions and offer considerations for practice.

What is Phonological Awareness?

Phonological awareness is an umbrella term that refers to the broad awareness of sounds within spoken language; under this umbrella are three subsets of skills: word awareness, syllable awareness, and phonemic awareness (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2001). Word awareness and syllable awareness skills involve larger units of sounds, and

are considered easier to master than skills involving smaller units of sound. As phonemic awareness involves the ability to hear and manipulate the sounds in spoken words, it is considered the more challenging for students to achieve (Callaghan & Madelaine, 2012; Yopp & Yopp, 2000). Table 1 includes a description of individual phonological awareness skills arranged in order of increasing complexity (see Appendix A).

Why is it Important?

Teaching young children to read is a major goal for primary grade teachers (Pfof, Hattie, Dorfler & Artelt, 2014). Before children learn to read print, they must understand how the smallest components of words work, and how these units impact a word's meaning (Adams, 1990; Zeece, 2006). While phonological and phonemic awareness are essential language skills that support young children's reading development, the acquisition of phonemic awareness is especially critical because it has been found to be a strong predictor of reading achievement (Foorman et al., 2016; Machado, 2013; Manning & Kato, 2006; Murray, 2012; NICHD, 2000). Further, children who receive phonemic awareness instruction around the time when they begin to learn to read demonstrate more skillful abilities than children without this instruction (Armbruster, Lehr, Osborn, & Adler, 2009; Uhry, 2011). Reciprocally, children with reading challenges often exhibit poor phonemic awareness skills (Abbott, Walton, & Greenwood, 2002; Manning & Kato, 2006). Phonemic awareness can contribute to later success in reading (Machado, 2013; Murray, 2012; NICHD, 2000) and as such, teachers have a responsibility to ensure that each student has a strong foundation in phonemic awareness.

Embedding Phonological Awareness During Transitions

Opportunities to embed phonological awareness throughout the day abound. Below we consider the three subsets of phonological awareness: word awareness, syllable awareness, and phonemic awareness and provide examples for how teachers can easily integrate phonological awareness instruction during quick transitions (1-2 minutes) and longer transitions (3-5 minutes). Each activity is flexible and could be done at any convenient time during the day.

Subset: Word Awareness, Skill: Rhyming

Quick transitional activity. As the teacher calls students to line up individually, he/she provides a word (e.g., sat) and points to students individually to generate words that rhyme with the target word (e.g., mat, cat, bat). When the student provides a correct rhyme, the teacher provides positive feedback and the student moves to line up. When the students run out of rhymes, the teacher selects a new target word and

continues until all students are lined up.

Longer transitional activity. The teacher gives each student a card with a different picture. The students have to identify the picture on their card and then find a classmate (or classmates) who have pictures that rhyme with their picture. For example, if a student has a card with a picture of a dog, they would identify that it was a dog and then find classmates who have pictures that rhyme (e.g., frog, log, hog).

When the students are in groups, the teacher leads the class in checking whether everyone is in the right place. If extra time remains, the teacher can challenge students to come up with more words that would fit in the group. At the culmination of the activity, the teacher calls each group to line up- collecting their picture cards as they move into line.

Subset: Syllable Awareness, Skill: Syllable Identification

Quick transitional activity. The teacher identifies objects around the room and gives students opportunities to count the number of syllables in the word. He/she points to the object, names it (e.g., calendar), and asks students to repeat the word. Then students clap the number of syllables in the word (/cal/ /en/ /dar/) and then, on the teacher's signal, hold up the fingers to show the number of syllables in the word. For example, the students would hold up three fingers for calendar. The teacher can then provide feedback on the responses. The activity can continue for as long as the transition lasts. As the students become proficient with this game, the teacher can select larger words with more syllables, give students the opportunity to "be the teacher", and/or provide a number and ask students to identify objects around the room that have that many syllables.

Longer transitional activity. The teacher leads students in an activity focused on identifying and counting syllables. The teacher has a bag filled with small objects (e.g., eraser, pencil, crayon, block) and selects a student to close his or her eyes and select an object from the bag. The student has to feel the object, determine what it is, and then open his or her eyes. The teacher will provide feedback on their response, and ask the whole class to say the name of the object together. Then, the children will clap each syllable in the word and hold up their fingers to show the number of syllables in the word. If additional time remains after all the items have been selected from the bag, the teacher can lead the class in arranging the items from the least to the greatest number of syllables.

Subset: Phonemic Awareness, Skills: Phoneme Blending and Segmenting

Quick transitional activity. The teacher will use a big book for this activity. For example, the teacher could have *Silly Sally* (Wood, 1994) open to the page where Silly Sally and the pig are dancing. The teacher will say, "I see something on this page. Can you guess what I see? I want you to listen to these sounds and blend them together quickly to say the word. I see a /p/ /i/ /g/. What do I see?" The teacher provides a signal and then the group responds together, "pig". If the group gets the word correct, they can line up. The teacher will continue until all groups have had a turn.

This activity works in the inverse as well. The teacher could tell students, as she points to the pig, "I'm going to name something I see and then you tell me all the sounds you hear in that word. I see a pig. What sounds do you hear in pig?"

Longer transitional activity. The teacher will provide each student with five counters for this segmenting activity. If it's not feasible to use counters, students can use their fingers to tap each sound they hear. The teacher will provide each student with five counters for this segmenting activity. The teacher can again refer to the images in a big book and after choosing one will say, "I want you to move one counter for every sound you hear in the word "desk." The student will move a counter for each sound that is heard. Once each student has their counters in place, the teacher can lead the class in segmenting the word, emphasizing each sound while touching each corresponding counter. Students would then blend the sounds together quickly to say the word while sweeping their finger from left to right under the counters. The teacher should begin with shorter words and increase in complexity as students get more familiar with the task.

Instructional Considerations

All of the examples provided above can be adapted by teachers to fit their classroom schedule, teaching style, and needs of students. Table 2 includes additional resources related to phonological awareness, including more activities that can be incorporated into classroom transitions. Below we offer a few considerations for implementing phonological awareness practice and supporting the needs of all learners.

Error Correction

In order to keep these transitional activities efficient, it's important to have clear error correction procedures in place. If an incorrect answer is provided, the teacher should model the proper response. For example, if a teacher is asking students to segment the sounds in the word pit and a student responds /pi/ /t/, the teacher would provide corrective feedback by first modeling the skill. For example, the teacher would respond, "Listen.

The sounds in pit are /p/ /i/ /t/)." The teacher would then encourage the student's participation, "Let's do it together. The sounds in /pit/ are: /p/ /i/ /t/." The next step requires having the student complete the task independently, "Now it's your turn. What sounds do you hear in the word pit?" The teacher could also decide to make error correction a whole group activity, instead of stating the correct answer singularly, the teacher could have the class respond in a choral manner. This could serve as a way to increase on-task behavior of the group and take pressure off students who make errors.

Using Pictures

Picture cards are useful tools for phonemic awareness practice. It is important to select pictures that are age appropriate, interesting, and clearly represent the target word. In some instances, the teacher may need to ensure the students know what is on their cards prior to the start of the activity. For example, there are some pictures students could name differently: plate/dish, rabbit/bunny, shoe/boot. Further, we do not recommend including labels with the pictures. Doing so could cause students to be right for the wrong reason. Specifically, a student may sort cards by beginning sound simply by looking at the first letter of the words, rather than saying the word and isolating the initial sound orally. Teachers can provide a preview of the words represented on the picture cards by quickly flipping through each picture card saying, "This is a _____." After the teacher names the image, the students will repeat the name of the image, and then the cards are distributed before the activity begins.

Easy to More Difficult

When delivering phonemic awareness practice, teachers should move from easy to more difficult skills and should target one to two skills per instructional session. These decisions should be made based on students' instructional needs. This guiding principle of easy to more difficult also applies to how teachers should select examples for students as they practice. Specifically, when working with syllable identification, blending, and segmenting, teachers should begin with compound words that can more easily be separated auditorily (e.g., /sun/ /shine/) then move to other types of words (e.g., /pen/ /cil/). When working with phoneme segmenting and blending, teachers should start with words that have a few sounds (e.g., vowel-consonant (VC) and consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) word types) and then move to more complex words as students demonstrate mastery.

Providing Support

There are several ways teachers can support students as they practice (McGee & Ukrainetz, 2009). To begin, teachers should model skills for students

prior to independent practice. This may involve physical movement like stomping, clapping, jumping, finger tapping as well as the use of manipulatives like pictures and counters. These supports can be beneficial because they provide students concrete representations during practice. For example, when counting the number of sounds in a spoken word (e.g., /map/) students can use their fingers to tap each sound (/m/ pointer finger taps thumb, /a/ middle finger taps thumb, /p/ ring finger taps thumb). Tapping in this way can help students segment each sound and then they can look to their fingers to see how many sounds were represented in the word. Finally, consistent corrective feedback, like the procedure described above, provides continuous support for students as they develop proficiency.

Linking to Letters

While phonological awareness and phonemic awareness are auditory skills, research has indicated that phonemic awareness training can be enhanced in a developmentally appropriate manner by linking to letters (Ehri, 2013; NICHD, 2000). Letters are the visual symbols that bridge the gap between oral and written language. When students understand that letters are the written representation of the sounds that they speak as they practice their phonological awareness activities, it enables them to put familiar sequences together to make words. For example, if a teacher engages students in blending onset-rime words, he could say the word /b-/in/, ask students to indicate what word he said, and then show them the letter sequence with the onset letter on one flash card and the rime letter cluster on another flash card. The teacher would put the two cards together to show students how they work to make a word. As the teacher segues into linking letters to sounds, the use of environmental print and students' names can also be effective as students are able to make personal associations with these words (Tompkins, 2015). This activity could be especially beneficial for students who are transitioning to formal reading instruction (see Appendix B).

Conclusion

With increased accountability measures and pressure to prepare more students with fewer resources and less time, teachers today can feel rushed to get through the curriculum. Therefore, providing students with opportunities to practice skills in a fun and inviting way requires taking advantage of every minute in the classroom. Phonemic awareness activities can be an effective use of time (Johnson & Keier, 2010) and can easily be integrated into transition times throughout the day. The practice of embedding phonological awareness activities in common transitions keeps students engaged, leads to improvements in

student behavior, and increases students' learning opportunities. Fisher et al. (2015) states that for learning to occur, students must, in some way, be paying attention, and each of these transitional activities enable teachers to maximize the amount of on-task experiences that students have throughout the day. Each of the activities provided are also straightforward, inexpensive, effective, and engaging. While the ideas and examples discussed above are by no means exhaustive, we offer them as a way to provide teachers with a starting point for examining and expanding their current practices, specifically as it relates to maximizing students' opportunities to learn.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Marisa Gonzales is a student in the M.Ed. Reading Program at the University of West Georgia. She may be reached at mgonzal7@my.westga.edu

Robert A. Griffin is an Adjunct Faculty member at the University of West Georgia in the Department of Literacy and Special Education. He may be reached at rgriffin@westga.edu.

Shawna Helf, PhD, is an associate professor of Education at Winthrop University in Rock Hill, South Carolina where she teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in literacy. She can be reached at helfs@winthrop.edu.

Katie Stover Kelly is an associate professor of education at Furman University in Greenville, SC, and coauthor of *From Pencils to Podcasts: Digital Tools to Transform K-6 Literacy Practices* (Solution Tree, 2017) and *Smuggling Writing: Strategies That Get Students to Write Every Day, in Every Content Area, Grades 3-12* (Corwin, 2016). Her new coauthored book with Lester Laminack will be published by Heinemann this fall. Find her on Twitter @[ktkelly14](https://twitter.com/ktkelly14).

Kavin Ming is an associate professor of Education and Director of the M.Ed. in Literacy Program at Winthrop University in Rock Hill, South Carolina where she teaches undergraduate literacy methods courses and graduate content area literacy and practicum courses. She can be reached at mingk@winthrop.edu.

Melissa Mitchell, M.Ed., is a doctoral student in the Reading Education Track in the School of Teaching, Learning, and Leadership at the University of Central Florida. She may be reached at Melissa.Mitchell@ucf.edu.

Lindsay Yearta is an assistant professor of literacy and educational technology at Winthrop University in Rock Hill, South Carolina. She has several peer-reviewed publications on digital literacies in the k-12 classroom and has co-authored the book *From Pencils to Podcasts: Digital Tools for Transforming K-6 Literacy Practices* with Katie Kelly. She may be reached at yeartal@winthrop.edu.

Vassiliki Zygouris-Coe is a Professor in the School of Teaching, Learning, and Leadership, University of Central Florida. She may be reached at [Vassiliki.Zygouris-Coe@ucf.edu](mailto:Zygouris-Coe@ucf.edu).

APPENDIX A

Table 1. Phonological Awareness Skills Arranged from Easier to More Complex

Phonological Awareness	Skill	The ability to...
Word Awareness	Word comparison	Identify specific characteristics of words “Listen to the following words: <i>met, happy</i> . Which word is longer?”
	Rhyming	Identify and create oral rhymes “Listen to the following words: glad, sad. Does glad rhyme with sad?” -or- “Listen to the following word: boy. Can you think of two other words that rhyme with boy?”
	Sentence segmentation	Identify specific words in spoken sentences “Listen to the following sentence: Today, we had pizza for lunch. I will say the sentence again. This time I want you to use your counters. Move one counter for each word that you hear.”
Syllable Awareness	Syllable blending	Identify and blend units of sound in spoken language “Listen to this name that has more than one syllable: /A/-/lan/. Whose name did I say?”
	Syllable segmenting	Identify and segment units of sound in spoken language “This object in our classroom has more than one syllable: table. Can you tell me how many beats it has? Can you stretch the word so that I can hear the beats?”
	Syllable identification	Identify units of sound in spoken words “I am going to say a word: closet. Can you clap the number of syllables that you hear?”
	Syllable deletion	Delete units of sound in spoken words “Listen to the following word: birthday. If I take away the birth, what do I have left?”
	Onset-rime blending	Combine the beginning and ending parts in spoken words “Listen. If I say the word: /s/-/it/, what word did I say?”
	Onset-rime segmentation	Stretch spoken words to hear its beginning and ending sounds “Listen to the following word: broom. I will say the beginning of the word, br-. Can you say the ending?”
Phonemic Awareness	Phoneme blending	Hear the individual sounds of the word sounded out slowly and then combine the sounds together to say the word aloud

Phonological Awareness	Skill	The ability to...
	Phoneme segmentation	<p>“Listen to the following sounds, /d/-/e/-/sk/. What word do these sounds make?”</p> <p>Hear a whole word pronounced and isolate its individual sounds “Listen to the word, book. Say the word slowly and take a breath between each sound.”</p>
	Phoneme identification	<p>Identify the individual sounds in spoken words. “Look at the picture of this trashcan. What is the first sound that you hear in can?”</p>
	Phoneme deletion	<p>Delete individual sounds in spoken words “Listen to the word, box. Can you say box without the /b/?”</p>
	Phoneme manipulation	<p>Identify and work with individual sounds in spoken words “Listen to the word, pen. Can you change the /p/ in pen to /h/?” “Listen to the word, pen. Can you change the /e/ in pen to /a/?” “Listen to the word, pen. Can you change the /n/ in pen to /t/?”</p>

APPENDIX B

Table 2. Additional Resources Related to Phonological Awareness

What phonological difficulties might look like from the perspective of the parent, student, and teacher:	http://www.readingrockets.org/helping/target/phonologicalphonemic
Phonological activities from the Florida Center for Reading Research:	http://www.fcrr.org/curriculum/pdf/GK-1/PA_Final_Part3.pdf
Internet-based phonological awareness games, created by Paws Inc and Ball State University:	http://www.professorgarfield.org/Phonemics/farmIntro2.html
Phonological awareness mini lessons that target specific skills:	https://www.readinga-z.com/phonological-awareness/phonological-awareness-lessons/
Phonological awareness activities across multiple skill areas:	http://www.phonologicalawareness.org/