

Word Families and the 4th Grade ESL Beginner

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Abstract

This action research project investigated the effect of direct word family instruction on reading comprehension for three 4th grade beginning ESL students. The activities included in the investigation were researched based word study strategies used for native English speakers including word sorts, shared reading, cloze activities, and making words. Instruction centered around one word family each week. Participants in the study included two boys and one girl, all of whom had been in United States' schools for less than 18 months. Findings show that the students' reading comprehension levels increased when given direct instruction on word families.

Background/Context

The purpose of this paper is to describe an action research study conducted by an ESL support teacher for fourth and fifth grade students. The teacher was entering her first year as an ESL support teacher following six years as a self-contained classroom teacher in the intermediate grade levels. The ESL teacher wanted to apply her previous learning and research on best instructional practice for native primary and intermediate students to the TEKS given by the Fort Bend ISD curriculum for ESL students.

According to the article, *Embarking on Action Research*, by Catherine M. Brighton, action research is “a reflective, systematic inquiry that focuses on a relevant problem in teaching or learning for the purpose of enacting meaningful change.” (2009) Action research is a procedural process that distinguishes itself from other forms of research by defining its purpose from a need being experienced by the teacher/researcher. Action research is a form of professional development that combines the elements of theory, practice and application of results. (Cohen & Byrnes, 2007)

Faced with the challenge of teaching non-English speaking students to learn the English language this teacher/researcher spent the summer months prior to the start of the 2008-2009 school year researching methods of language instruction for English as a Second Language (ESL) students. The challenge seemed even greater due to the fact this teacher knew no other language than English. Much of the professional literature that was initially read provided helpful suggestions such as the use of gestures, pictures, and repetitive routines to help aid instruction. However, these strategies seemed to address the issues of behavior and basic communication rather than instruction. She was left wondering, how do teachers instruct native English speakers to read, write, and speak English? Wouldn't these same strategies influence non-English speaking students as well? As ideas on primary level instruction started churning through her mind, the summer came to an end and the teacher was given the district provided materials to teach the curriculum. Much to her surprise, the curriculum was centered around basal readers and songs on tape. Each component holds a valuable place in literacy instruction, however, the teacher noticed that the language included in these materials were at a much higher reading level than her beginning ESL students would be able to read independently or with support. It was this that led to the start of this action research project. The teacher went back to her initial questions from the summer, and began reading through professional literature regarding literacy instruction for native beginning readers and writers. The literature placed an emphasis on the role of shared reading, shared writing, and word study. Word study seemed to be lacking from the materials provided by the district. The teacher then became determined to find a way to introduce word study instruction to better teach the TEKS of the district curriculum.

Word study holds a valuable place in literacy instruction in all elementary grade levels. However, there is little to no research found about the use of word study in literacy instruction for ESL students. The teacher, feeling that best practice theories for native students could transfer as best teaching practice for non-native students wanted to conduct research to help provide evidence for this belief. The teacher sought out to find: Does direct instruction with word families and word parts increase the reading comprehension level of Non-English speaking (NES) and Limited English speaking (LES) students at the fourth grade level?

This study examines the influence of word study on the reading comprehension levels of three 4th grade beginning ESL students. The participants have lived in the United States for less than 18 months and were assessed as NES and LES students according to their beginning of the year Oral Language Proficiency Test (OLPT). Two students were educated in Saudi Arabia prior to their education in the United States, while the third student received his previous education in China. The two boys and girl had some English instruction in their native country. They currently attend a school in a suburb of a southeastern Texas' city, in an elementary school where 25% of their students qualify for ESL services. These three students meet in the ESL room daily for twenty minutes where they receive direct instruction of English word families and word parts (i.e. blends, affixes, parts of speech, etc.).

Does direct instruction with word families and word parts increase the reading comprehension level of beginning and intermediate ESL students? The afore mentioned students participated in a four month study to see the gains made in reading comprehension when reading instruction included twenty minutes of word study instruction daily, primarily studying word families.

Research on Word Study

In the following review of literature a definition of word study will be given. Next integral elements of a word study program will be examined. To conclude, a description of how a word study program is applied at the primary level as well as the intermediate level will be given.

Defining Word Study

Word study, as described by Gay Su Pinnell and Irene Fountas in *Words Matter* (1998), is the instructing and learning of the structure of the English language. The key components of a word study curriculum would include phonics instruction, word work, vocabulary instruction and handwriting. Word study is just as it sounds, the explicit instruction and study of words, their parts, and their meanings. Many activities have been developed and are common place in the primary classroom. An emphasis on making these activities “hands-on” and with an element of inquiry has been made when developing the activities to provide opportunities for the construction of knowledge. These activities include but are not limited to making words, word sorts, speed drills, syllable drills, word walls, and direct phonics instruction (Fountas and Pinnell, 1998). A word wall is a wall in the classroom used to display and study words. The word wall is a learning resource in which students can refer to the words posted in the classroom to discover the spelling of a word. Making words is an activity in which students are given letters that spell one specific mystery word, usually around seven letters long. Students, however, are also given the challenge to create as many two, three, and four or more letter words that they can, using the letters given to them. Often, in making words, students are guided in making words from certain word patterns. At other times, students are asked to explore and discover what words can be made from the letters given. Word sorts require students to group words which are alike in one way or another. Other interpretations of a word study program have been researched, created,

and have been included in the classroom setting. One of those programs is the *Four Block Method of Literacy Instruction*. According to the *Four Blocks Method of Literacy Instruction*, by Patricia Cunningham, Dorothy Hall and Cheryl Sigmon (1999), working with words, or word study involves students in learning high frequency words and common spelling patterns in order to read and write fluently. Fluent reading and writing has phonemic awareness, or the understanding of and the ability to apply letter sounds, at its core. The research conducted by the author's of *Phonemic Awareness in Young Children*, indicates that phonemic awareness has a direct correlation to a reader's comprehension level. According to *Phonemic Awareness in Young Children* (Adams, Foorman, Lundberg, & Beeler, 1999) the strongest determinant of a child's success in reading was the level of phonemic awareness that child entered school having already mastered. It was research findings like the above that pushed word study, including phonemic instruction, to become a focus in the primary classroom.

Research completed by Adams, Foorman, Lundberg and Beeler (1999), has indicated that students lacking phonemic awareness and concepts of print when entering elementary school can make significant gains in their literacy abilities through the direct instruction of phonemes and phonology. Phonology is "the study of the unconscious rules governing speech-sound production." (Adams, Foorman, Lundberg & Beeler, 1999, p.3) However, providing students with phonology instruction through spelling families and word patterns is more effective than a rules-based program. Evidence showed that spelling patterns and word family instruction allowed learners to read and spell more fluently by recognizing word parts and applying the sounds to new and unfamiliar words. (Cunningham & Hall, 1994) Research conducted regarding the brain by the author of *Making Words* (1994) Patricia Cunningham and Dorothy Hall, has indicated that the brain is able to recognize patterns much more efficiently than it is able to apply

rules. Therefore, a learner, when faced with an unknown word will be more likely to decode this new word by searching its brain for a similar letter pattern, rather than applying phonemic rules to the word. (Cunningham & Hall, 1994)

Words their Way, a word study program developed by Donald Bear, Marcia Invernizzi, Shane Templeton, and Francine Johnston (2004), takes a slightly different approach to the way in which they have developed their curriculum. In *Words their Way*, the developers have centered their program on the study of orthography, the study of spelling. They followed 30 years of research to create a program that focuses on common misspellings and the reasons for those misspellings. Bear and his colleagues (2004) describes the spelling system in the English language to have three parts: alphabet, patterns and meaning. The alphabetic portion of the English spelling system focuses on the relationship between letters and sounds. Word patterns focus on the many sounds that letters can make in combination with other letters. Rather than focusing on sound rules, focusing on patterns allows learners of the English spelling system to make generalities and increase their spelling accuracy. The final piece of the three tiered English spelling system is meaning. This focuses on the relationship between words and the meaning and/or meanings that a word can possess. Again, Bear, et. al. (2004) claim their program is founded on research that proves the study of words is an integral part of literacy learning in the English Language.

Word Study at the Primary Level

The goal of word study at the primary level of instruction is to introduce beginning readers and writers to the English language and its structure. According to a continuum

developed by Fountas and Pinnell (2003), primary students need to be exposed to early literacy concepts, phonological awareness, letter knowledge, letter/sound relationships, spelling patterns, high frequency words, word meaning, word structure and word-solving actions. These skills are taught beginning in kindergarten and continue through grade two. The purpose of instruction in these nine areas of phonics is to provide students with “a comprehensive picture of linguistic knowledge.” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2003) Cunningham and Hall (1999) apply these nine areas of linguistic knowledge through the use of these word study activities: word walls, making words, rounding up the rhymes and guess the covered word. The focus of word walls is to provide the primary student with vocabulary instruction regarding critical words used in all content areas and to provide a place in the room for students to reference these words. Activities like making words and rounding up rhymes allow student exposure to and the transfer of letters to word parts and patterns. These activities allow students to recognize how words patterns can be applied to decode a new, unfamiliar term from words they already know. (Cunningham, Hall, & Sigmon, 1999) Emphasizing activities like these in the primary grades benefits students’ reading abilities as research has shown a direct correlation to the level of students’ linguistic knowledge and their ability to read and comprehend literature. (Adams, Foorman, Lundberg, & Beeler, 1999)

Word Study at the Intermediate Level

Word study in the upper grade levels is a continuation of the strategies and skills that were introduced in the earlier grades. However, instruction looks different than the primary grade levels as teachers begin focus on “word etymology, Greek and Latin roots, and deeper content-area vocabulary.” (Diller, 2005) As vocabulary directly affects students’ ability to read and comprehend grade level materials, a focus on words is integral at the intermediate level. Word study in the intermediate grades should focus on the larger words that students will

encounter. Not only do these words have a tendency to be more difficult to pronounce but analyzing the word parts becomes more challenging as well (Loman, Arens, & Cunningham, 2007). The focus of word study in the upper grades transitions from the phonics instruction in the primary grades to a focus on morphological instruction in the upper grades. This includes focusing on affixes, polysyllabic words, syntax or grammar, and vocabulary. Morphology can enhance students' reading and writing ability in many ways. Studying morphologic elements will allow students to recognize patterns in word parts and their meaning. Thus, allowing students to better understand the meaning of unfamiliar words based upon recognizable word parts. Morphology instruction builds students vocabulary and increases knowledge of word etymology. (Loman, Arens & Cunningham, 2007) Word study can function as a continuation of strategies in the upper grades but it also allows teachers to reach those struggling readers and writers by focusing on the gaps in learning that the struggling students' possess. (Diller, 2005) According to a study by Janet Bloodgood and Linda Pacifici done in 2004, "word study in intermediate classrooms increase student interest in words, expanded vocabularies and expanded effective strategies to make sense of how written language works." (Bloodgood & Pacifici, 2004)

Word Study and ESL Students

Many studies have been documented and many theories have been created regarding the acquisition of a second language. All research regarding the acquisition of a second language centers around research conducted regarding the acquisition of a first language. "First language acquisition is a universal achievement of children the world over." (Peregoy & Boyle, 2005 p.52) The theories regarding both first and second language acquisition center around three perspectives: behaviorist, innatist, and interactionist. A behaviorist believes that language is acquired through modeling and imitation with reinforcement regarding correct form. An innatist

believes that language is acquired through “creative construction of syntactic rules.” (Peregoy & Boyle, p.51, 2005) An interactionist believes language emerges from communication and that caregivers scaffold the communication between themselves and the learning. (Peregoy & Boyle, 2005) Educators must find a way to take non-native students and instruct them in English. Instructional practices, including sheltered instruction, group work, thematic instruction and scaffolding, have been proven to be successful techniques in educating ESL students. (Peregoy & Boyle, 2005) Word study integrates these means of communicating new information as well as literacy learning.

Research regarding word study and the ESL student is limited. Sources suggests that beginning ESL readers and writers should focus on phonics and sight word instruction, word families and allow for invented spelling. According to Bear, et. al. (2004) in *Words their Way*, word study can and should be adapted for the ESL learner. While the strategies and instruction may be quite similar for native learners and ESL learners, the teacher should approach the instruction in a different manner, especially when the ESL learner is a competent reader in their home language. For example, when studying alphabetic principles, the teacher needs to focus not only on the letter/sound relationship of the English letter but be aware that the letter sound may be a whole new sound to the student. Instruction regarding how to pronounce the sound may need to be given to the ESL student (Bear, et. al. 2004). Fountas and Pinnell (2003) also believe that word study is appropriate for English Language Learners. They emphasize the need to make certain allocations and exceptions for ESL students but they should be active participants in the word study activities. (Fountas and Pinnell, 2003)

Word study is the instruction and learning of the structure of the English Language (Fountas and Pinnell, 1998). Word Study includes the study of word parts, spelling patterns,

phonemics, word origins, and concepts of print. Research has shown that phonemic awareness and recognition of word patterns is directly correlated to a student's ability to read. Evidence shows the need for word study in both the primary and intermediate grades. According to the authors of *Words their Way*, Bear, et. al. (2004) word study can and should be adapted for the ESL student. Instructional theories by Fountas and Pinnell (1996, 1998, 2003) promote similar ideals that ESL students can and should be included in word study component of literacy instruction.

After using this research, the ESL support teacher felt as though this study could link primary, intermediate, and ESL theories of instruction. Her students were in the intermediate grade levels; however, they required reading material at the very beginning stages of primary instruction. The antecedent causing these students to read at such a low level was that they were beginning learners of the English language. The included literature review has promoted research which indicates that word study is beneficial for primary level, intermediate level, and ESL students separately. But does this theory apply to students who fall into all three categories? Research could not be found that linked these components together. Would the strategies used to educate native primary learners transfer to non-native, intermediate grade level students? Researchers (Fountas and Pinnell, 1996, 1998, 2003; Bear, et. al, 2004; Cunningham, Hall, and Sigmon, 1999) have stated their research and theories from the viewpoint of instructing native learners. When reading through instructional theories from the viewpoint of educating non-native, ESL learners, little to no research can be found in regards to how much word study will improve the reading abilities of an ESL student. It was in hopes of bridging the native literacy instructional theories to the non-native literacy instructional theories that this

teacher/researcher asked the question: Does direct instruction with word families and word parts increase the reading comprehension level of beginning and intermediate ESL students?

Method

Participants

Three beginning ESL students, two boys and a girl participated in this action research study. All students were in the fourth grade and had been in the United States less than 18 months prior to the 2008-2009 school year. The students were assessed at the NES and LES level for English proficiency. The three students are in the same homeroom and receive direct ESL instruction for 20 minutes a day five times a week. The remaining minutes of their ESL service (70 minutes daily) were provided in an inclusion setting with their homeroom teacher and their ESL support teacher co-teaching the literacy block. Students in the research group were reading below grade level. According to the beginning of the DRA II testing, these three students were at or below the first grade reading level. The three students achieved a score of 6, 12, and 16 on their initial DRA II test. Their low DRA II testing scores were the initial reason for providing intensive literacy instructional time tailored toward their needs for 20 minutes a day.

Materials

Phonics Poetry: Teaching Word Families by Timothy Rasinski and Belinda Zimmerman (2000), is a collection of poems and word study activities. The authors created this collection of poems to facilitate a whole-to-part process of instruction. The ideas and poems provided from this book were used weekly. Students participated in choral reading of the poems multiple times

till they gained fluency with the poem. From there, instruction focused more on word parts and word study, rather than the poem itself. Comprehension and reading discussions regarding the meaning of the poem were held as well. A computer with a microphone and recording device were used to record students' fluency and running records. Leveled books from the guided reading library were used to determine reading levels from the running records. Many word study activities were used from the following books: *The Wonder of Word Study: Lessons and Activities to Create Independent Readers, Writers, and Spellers* by Lauren Berman Lucht (2006); *Making Words* by Patricia M. Cunningham and Dorothy P. Hall (1994); *40 Wonderful Blend & Digraph Poems* compiled by Shelley Grant and Dana Haddad (2005).

Data Sources

Data was collected through quantitative and qualitative means. At the beginning of the year, students involved in this study were given a DRA II assessment. The DRA II is scored on three components: a reading inventory, fluency and comprehension. Students are rated on each numeral level as intervention, instruction, independent, and advanced. When testing at a level 12 or above, a student scoring at the independent or advanced level continues to the next numeral level. On levels 10 or below, students advanced to the next numeral level when they achieve a ranking of advanced. Running records taken on a bi-weekly basis as well as the TELPAS reading scores will be used to measure and observe growth. TELPAS reading assessments are scored by the state after ESL students have submitted the TELPAS reading test on-line. The posttest data will include an end of the year DRA II assessment as well as a final running record. Qualitative data will be collected as a means to support the pre and post data. The support data that will be collected include:

1. recorded samples of students' fluency and documented according to a running record

2. student interviews regarding:
 - a. their thoughts and opinions on their growth
 - b. participation in the intervention.

Does direct instruction with word families and word parts increase the reading comprehension level of beginning and intermediate ESL students? The baseline data and posttest data gathered by the DRA II was used to show if and how much growth takes place when daily word study instruction is provided. Interviews, running records, and TELPAS scores were used as supplemental data to show whether or not increased levels of reading comprehension occurred among the three students who were participating in the study.

Procedures

The procedures for this study include a weekly plan to introduce a word family to the students and activities that will actively engage students in the use of English words that are members of the word family for the week. The weekly plan used for this research project is as follows:

Table 1

Weekly Plan for Word Study Instruction

Monday

- Introduction of a Digraph, more commonly know as a blend, which is when two or more letters at the beginning of the word make one sound, i.e. /sh/ or /tr/
- Student brainstorming of words containing blend (words will be added throughout the week as new words are discovered)
- Shared reading of a poem including

the blend that is being studied
Homework: Read your poem to 5 other people and have them sign the poem to show they listened and supported your reading; due on Friday

Tuesday

- Introduction of a Word Family
- Student brainstorming of words containing word family (words will be added throughout the week as new words are discovered)
- Shared reading of a poem including the blend that is being studied

Homework: Read your poem to 5 other people and have them sign the poem to show they listened and supported your reading; due on Friday

Wednesday

- Handwriting practice: words from the word family
- Running Record
- Word family Word Sort
- Cloze Activity (A Cloze activity is a sentence or passage with words removed requiring students to place a word in the blank of the passage which would maintain the meaning of the phrase. It is an exercise that focuses on student comprehension)

Homework: Word family practice page

Thursday

Thursday cont.

- Making words- given seven letters, students make as many two, three, four or more letter words. Letters are included so that students are able to create words from the word family. Students are also challenged to find the mystery word

Homework: Making words at Home (Students are encouraged to complete the making word task at home with family members to see if more words can be discovered)

Friday

- Handwriting practice: word family poem for the week
- Shared reading of blend and word family poem from the week.

- Word study “game” or learning activity to celebrate words learned (i.e. SWAT! Word family bingo, etc.)

Data Analysis

A descriptive analysis of data collected is used to answer the question: Does direct instruction with word families and word parts increase the reading comprehension level of beginning and intermediate ESL students? Viewing and analyzing data was a process that occurred throughout the 4 months of research. In September of 2008, a DRA II was given to the three students participating in the project. This was used as baseline data. In January, when the action research project began, running records were collected on a bi-weekly basis. On Wednesdays, students would read a passage aloud, from a guided reading book on their DRA level, for one minute. A word per minute count as well as an accuracy percentage was recorded. If a student read at a 95% or higher level of accuracy and could complete a summary or retell of what they read at a 90% accuracy or higher, than they advanced to the next DRA level. The following bi-weekly running record would be taken at that DRA level. If a student was not reading at a 95% accuracy level or if they were unable to summarize or retell at a 90% accuracy level, the student would continue to work at that DRA level for the following two weeks.

The post data includes a DRA II score, TELPAS ratings, and students’ opinions of themselves as readers. This information was collected throughout the months of April and May. Growth for each student will be dependent upon their increase in DRA levels from September to May and an increase in their TELPAS rating. TELPAS rates students as beginning, intermediate, advanced, or advanced high in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Each ESL

student is expected to make one years growth. One year's growth is the promotion from one ESL level to another. For example, starting the year as a beginner and concluding the school year with a TELPAS rating of intermediate reflects one year's growth. A student who begins the year with a rating of intermediate and concludes the year with a TELPAS rating of advanced high, has made two years progress in one years time. The researcher also wanted students to conclude the year with positive feelings of themselves as a reader. Input from student surveys will be used to document this information.

Findings

An analysis of DRA II pretest data in the fall, biweekly running records, DRA II posttest data in the spring, and TELPAS scores for the 2009 school year revealed that all three students showed growth in their levels of reading comprehension when given twenty minutes of direct instruction in word families and word parts on a daily basis.

Student One

Student one began the 2008-2009 school year as a Non-English speaking (NES) ESL student. The student entered United States schools in January of 2008. During the final months of the 2008 school year, this student went through a silent period in which little to no English was communicated. The student's lack of communication caused him to be exempt from the TELPAS testing, which means that no reading level (beginning, intermediate, advanced) was given to the student. So little was communicated student one's teachers did not feel this student could respond to the test questions. Student one's initial DRA II score in September of 2008 was a six. When beginning the intervention in January, Student one began reading books at a DRA level 10. With the first book *Space Boy Finds A Friend* (DRA 10), Student one read 93 words per minute (wpm) with a 99% accuracy. At the conclusion of the study, Student one was

comprehending books at a level 18. His/her final reading was *Jordan's Lucky Day* (DRA 18). Student one read 77 wpm with 97% accuracy. After working in the fourth grade classroom and 16 weeks of intervention, this student scored 8 independent on their DRA II. Achieving an independent score, rather than advanced, on the level 8 DRA concluded the testing.

However, teachers who work with student one feel that his/her instructional level of reading comprehension is much higher. During guided reading in the classroom, and when assessing students on a running record, teachers work with students on their instructional level. While student one showed minimal growth by increasing their DRA II score from a 6 to an 8, the support data shows that student one increased their reading level more than one DRA II level. The running records taken throughout this action research project show growth from a level 6 to a level 18, which is six DRA levels. Six DRA levels is much more growth than the one level shown on the DRA II. The student would have needed to achieve a level 16 independent on his/her DRA II score to show one year's growth. According to the 2009 TELPAS rating system, this student went from being a beginning reader to an intermediate reader, showing one year's growth. The TELPAS rating system rates students on four levels: beginning, intermediate, advanced, and advanced high. An increase from one level to another is considered one year's growth. Both the TELPAS testing and running records, which were used as support data for this research, show more growth from student one than the DRA II testing demonstrates.

According to a student survey, at the beginning of the year, student 1 did not feel as though "they were a strong reader." Student one states, "the words are harder in English than in Arabic and they were hard to read." Now student one feels as though they "might be a good reader because sometimes they have to stop to sound out a word and sometimes they can read the words quickly." Again, according to the same student survey, Student one enjoyed working with

the poems, because it “made reading easy and fun.” According to teacher observation, the word study activities that went with the poems were fun for the student as well. Student 1 had a more difficult time with the activities than the other two students. At times, student 1 would compare himself/herself with the other students. He/she did not read with equal ease as the other two and has conveyed to this his/her teacher, on many occasions, which he/she is not as good of a reader as the others. Teacher observation has lead to the belief this has led to student one’s feelings of “maybe” being a good reader. It is my observation that this student has shown growth in their abilities as a reader, and in their confidence as a reader. I believe that student one’s opinion of his/her reading ability would increase if student one was in a homogenous group of students, taking away his ability to compare his/her abilities with those around him/her.

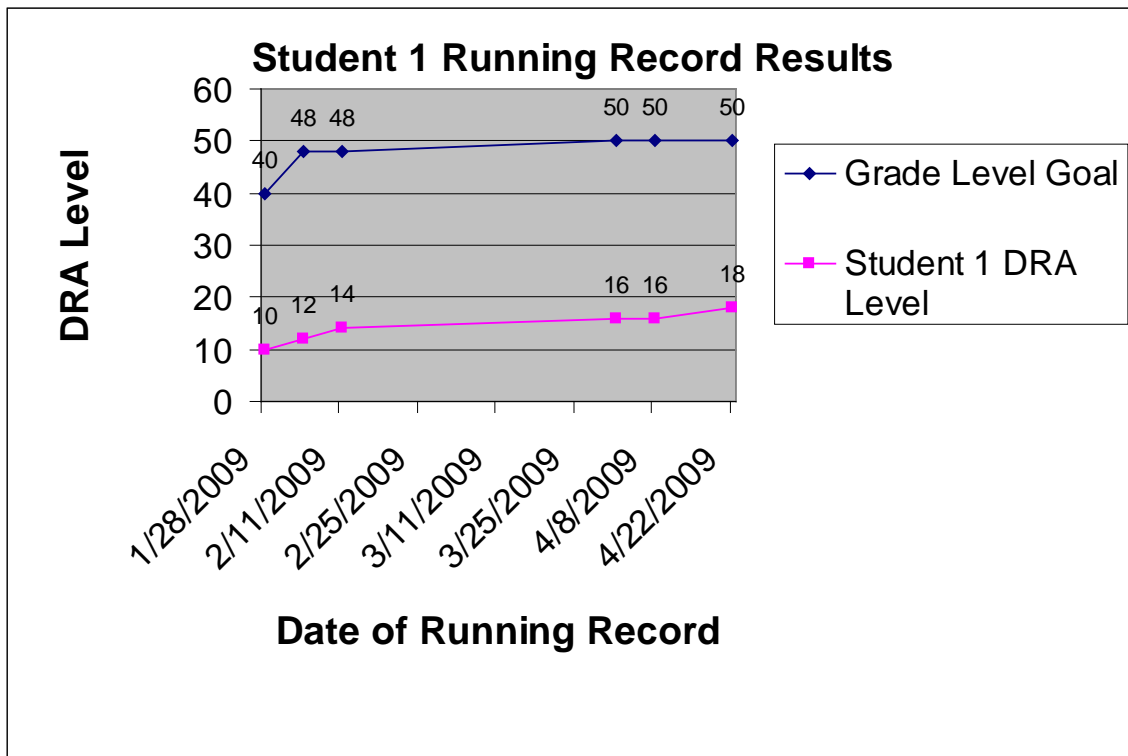


Figure 1. Student 1 running record results.

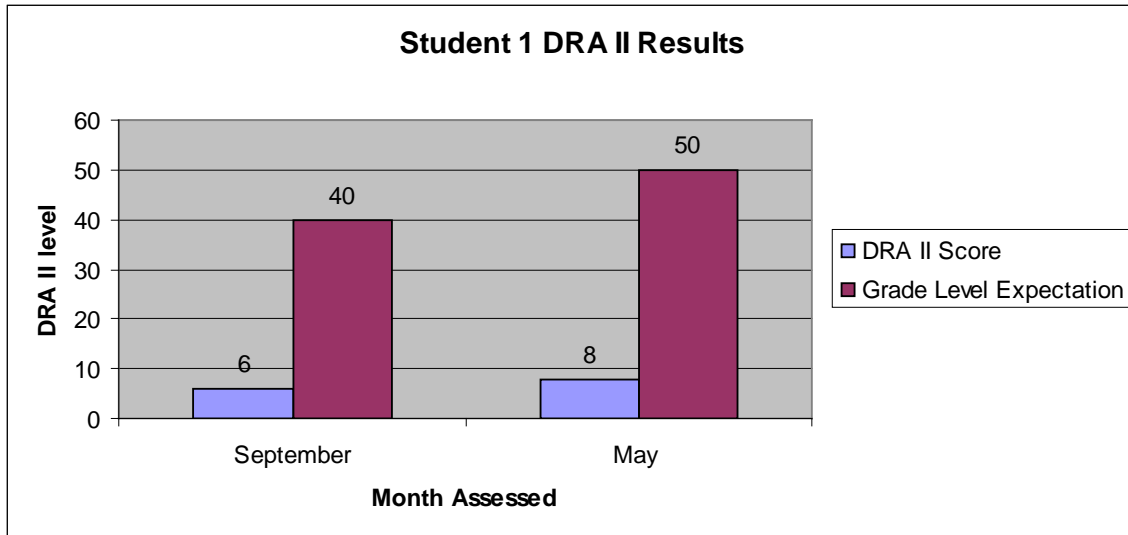


Figure 2. Student 1 DRA II results.

Student Two

Student two began the 2008-2009 school year as a Limited English speaking (LES) ESL student. The student entered United States schools in January of 2007. The student entered Texas schools after completing a year and a half in Michigan public schools. Little is known of student two's schooling in Michigan. Student two's initial DRA II score in September was 12. When beginning the intervention in January, Student two had shown growth in his/her reading comprehension, and so began reading books at a DRA level 18. With the first book *The Bubble Gum Contest* (DRA 18), Student two read 88 words per minute (wpm) with 97% accuracy. At the conclusion of the study Student two was comprehending books at a level 28. His/Her final reading was *King Midas and the Golden Touch* (DRA 28). Student two read 74 wpm with 100% accuracy. After working in the fourth grade classroom and 16 weeks of intervention, this student scored 18 on their DRA II. An 18 is equivalent to an end of the year first grader. According to the 2009 TELPAS rating system, this student went from being an intermediate reader to an advanced reader, showing one year's growth.

According to a student survey, student two enjoyed coming to the ESL classroom to participate in word study. Student two stated, “that they enjoy poems, and that they worked with a lot of poems.” One thing student two did not enjoy was “when his/her peers would not read in sync, he/she enjoyed when they read together at the same pace because it sounded better.” According to the survey, student two felt that “working with the poems and word study helped them to read English better because he/she was able to read the words of the poem and then read the words other places.” Student two feels as though they are a good reader because “he/she will read easier books first and then they are able to read harder books after.” Based on teacher observations, the ease of which they are able to read a text has led to student two’s feelings of success. According to teacher observation, student two strives to please the teacher and enjoys out performing those around him/her. It appeared as over achieving his/her peers was motivational for student two. Student two acted as a teacher in which he/she constantly worked to keep his/her two other classmates on task when participating in a group project.

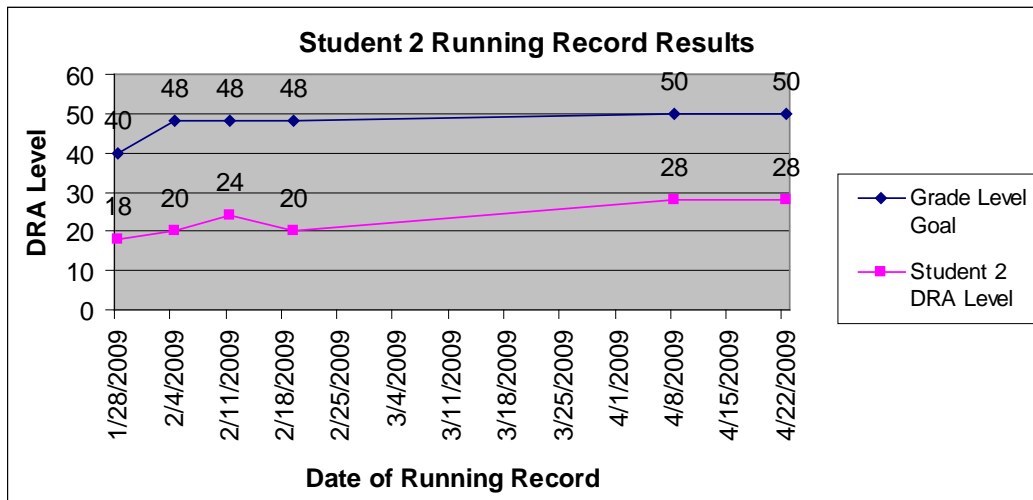


Figure 3. Student 2 running record results.

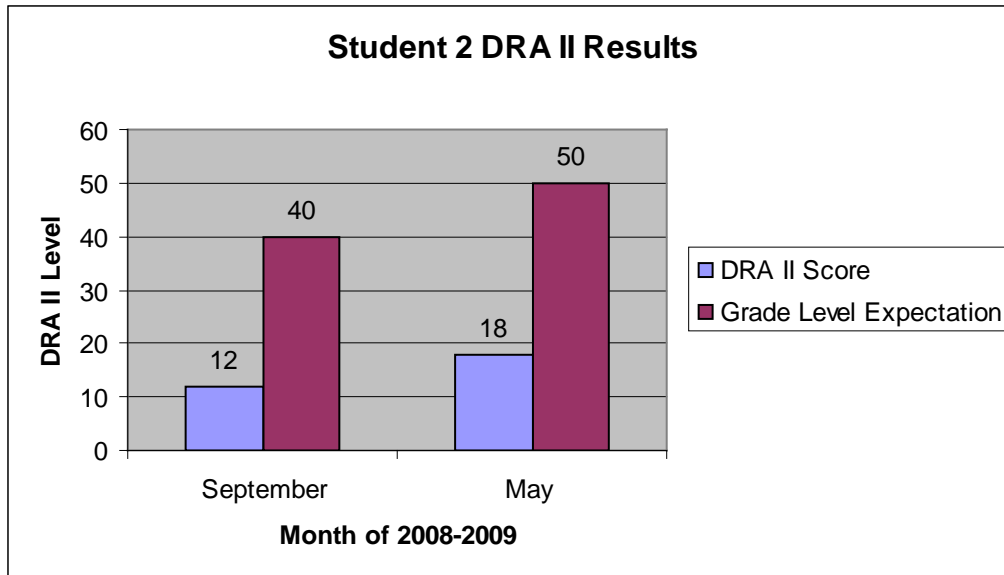


Figure 4. Student 2 DRA II results.

Student Three

Student three began the 2008-2009 school year as a Non-English speaking (NES) ESL student. The student entered United States schools in August of 2008. The student entered Texas schools after receiving schooling in Beijing, China. Student three did receive some English language instruction in Beijing but entered U.S. schools with a rating of NES, non-English speaking. Student three's initial DRA II score in September was 16. A DRA II score of 16 is considered to be equivalent to the average reading level of a first grader in the month of December. When beginning the intervention in January, Student three began reading books at a DRA level 20. With the first book *Space Monster Saves the Day* (DRA 20), Student three read 117 words per minute (wpm) with 98% accuracy. Throughout the study, the student had some absences from school that prevented a measuring of his DRA level in the month of February. At the conclusion of the study Student three was reading books at a level 40. Their final reading was *A Wild Race in the Sun* (DRA 40). Student three read 102 wpm with a 96% accuracy. After working in the fourth grade classroom and 16 weeks of intervention, this student scored 28 on

their DRA II. A DRA II level of 28 equivalent to an end of the year second grader. The TELPAS rating system rates students on four levels: beginning, intermediate, advanced and advanced high. Each time a student reaches the next level on their TELPAS assessment, the student has shown one year's growth. According to the 2009 TELPAS rating system, this student went from being a beginning reader to an advanced high reader, showing three years growth in one year's time.

According to a student survey, student 3 felt that "the word study activities [which took place during the intervention time] were great and interesting." He/ she enjoyed reading the poems because student three "enjoyed finding the rhythm of each poem." Student three states that "one thing I did not enjoy with the poems was that they had to read together as a group." Student three would have preferred to read the poem by himself/herself. When asked, student three said, "I view myself as a good reader because I the poems were easy to read." Through teacher observation it is believed that the feeling of ease with a passage led to confident feelings as a reader. Student three was also the highest achieving student in the group, which may have led to his very confident feelings as a reader. The teacher observed strong reading skills in the student's native language (student three read many of the Harry Potter books in mandarin Chinese this year) which may correlate to his/her high abilities as a reader of English.

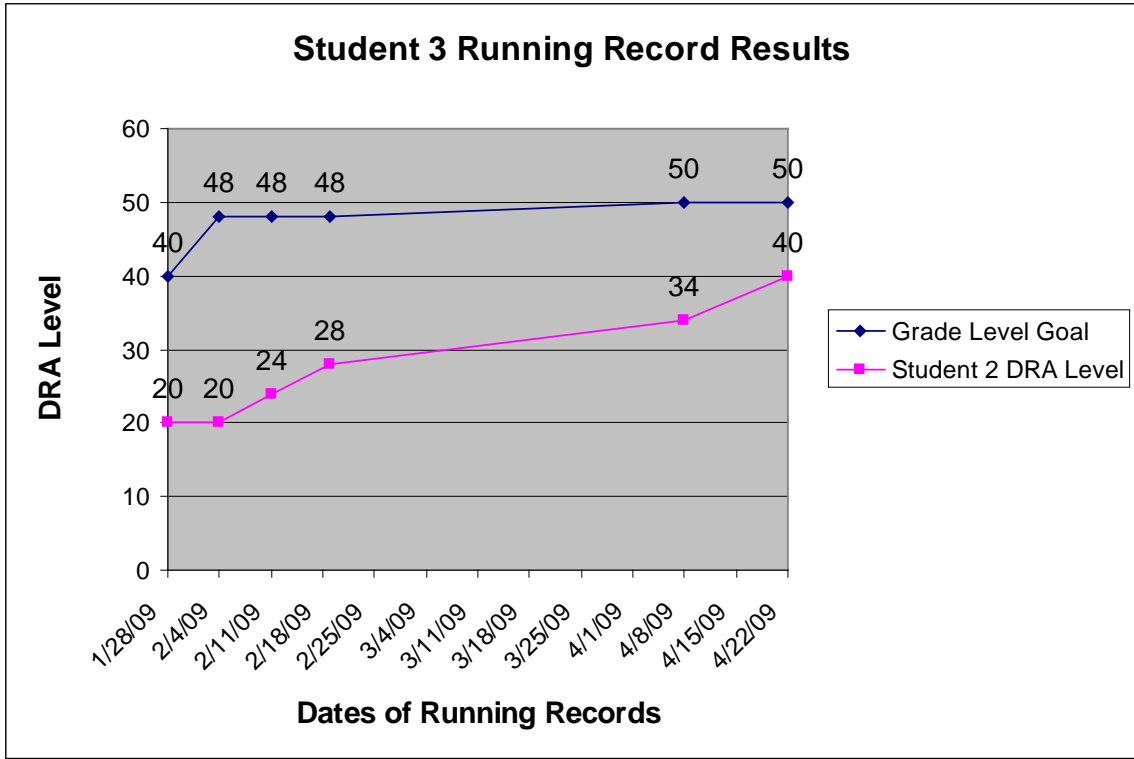


Figure 5. Student 3 running record results.

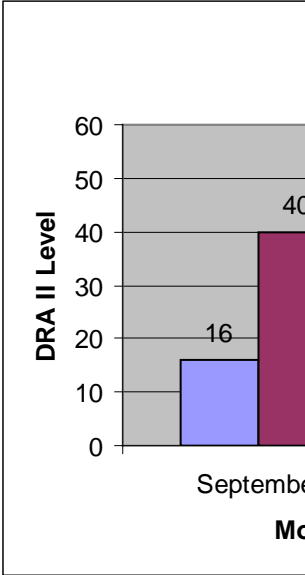


Figure 6. Student 3 DRA II results.

The three students who participated in this action research had varying results. Student one showed one DRA level of growth according to the baseline and post assessment data. However, supporting data, including the running records that were kept during this study as well as the TELPAS assessment show more growth than one DRA level. Student one did not know enough English to take the TELPAS in 2008 to achieving an intermediate rating on his/her 2009 TELPAS. Also, student one’s running records results showed four levels of DRA growth from the start of the project till the conclusion.

Student two showed three DRA levels of growth according to the baseline and post assessment data. However, supporting data, including the running records that were kept during this study as well as the TELPAS assessment show more growth than three DRA levels. Three

DRA levels is equivalent to half a year's growth as the current levels the student was working at. Student two received a TELPAS rating of intermediate on the 2008 TELPAS assessment. In 2009, student two received a rating of advanced, showing one year's growth. Student two's results from the running records indicate five DRA levels of growth for the duration of this study, which is again, more than the three levels indicated by the baseline and post assessment data.

Student three showed six DRA levels of growth according to the baseline and post assessment data. Again, supporting data, including the running records that were kept during this study as well as the TELPAS assessment show more growth than six DRA levels. Student three began the year as a beginning ESL student. Student three was not in the country in 2008 to take the TELPAS assessment. According to the 2009 TELPAS assessment, student three achieved a rating of advanced high. This shows three year's growth, in one year's time. Also, student three running records which were taken during this action research project show ten DRA levels of growth, which is much more than the six levels of growth shown by the baseline and post assessment data.

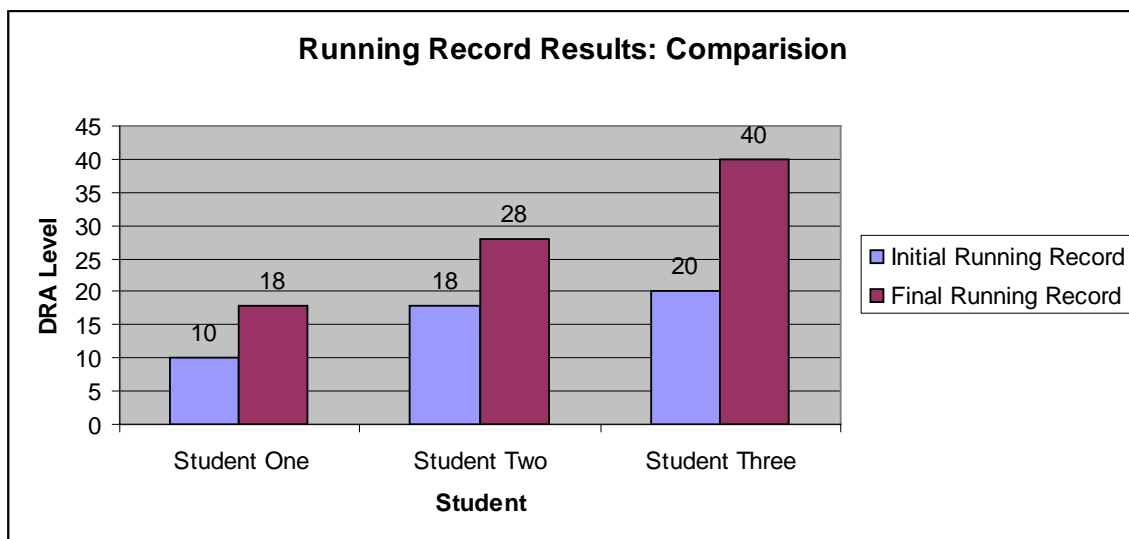


Figure 7. Comparison of running record results.

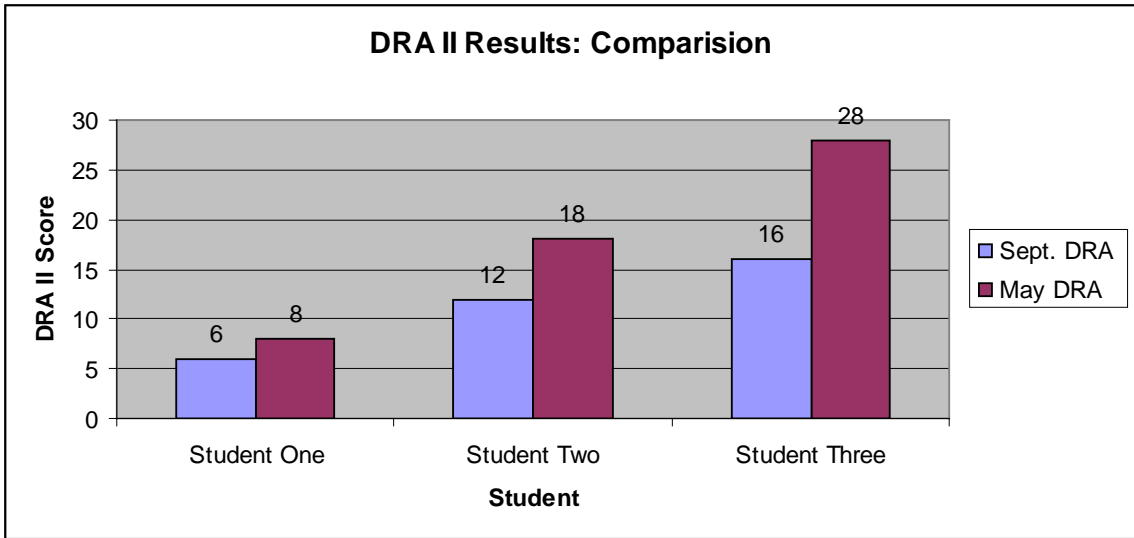


Figure 8. Comparison of DRA II results.

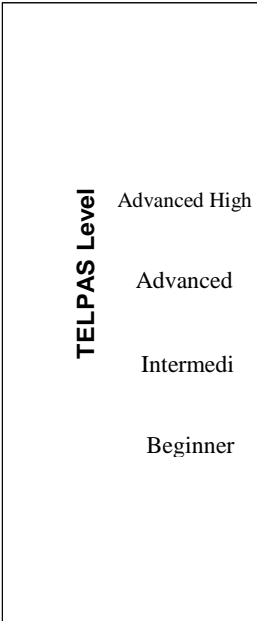


Figure 9. Comparison of TELPAS levels.

Discussion

Does direct instruction with word families and word parts increase the reading comprehension level of beginning and intermediate ESL students? The answer is yes. This study provides evidence of the value of including word study in a literacy block with beginning

and intermediate ESL students. I found that these three ESL students increased both their reading comprehension as well as their opinion of themselves as readers. All students showed at least one year's growth if not more. According to the TELPAS rating system, each student made adequate gains for the year. Student 3 made significant gains according to the TELPAS rating system, by showing three years growth in a year's time. By focusing on a word family each week, students were exposed to word chunks, which allowed them to apply those sounds in reading. Therefore, their knowledge of the structure of the English language increased as did their vocabulary and ability to comprehend. Students, who were once non-verbal and silent for most of the school day, were now feeling confident in their ability to read.

Previous research indicates that word study is valuable for primary, intermediate, and ESL students. It was this researcher's goal to provide a link between theories regarding non-native literacy instruction and native literacy instruction in hopes of finding what works for one may be sound practice for another. This project has shown that using instructional theories for native students' literacy instruction also brings about growth in non-native students, primarily in the area of word study. The key components of a word study curriculum include phonics instruction, word work, vocabulary instruction and handwriting. Research conducted by the author's of *Phonemic Awareness in Young Children* stated a direct correlation between a reader's phonemic awareness and a reader's comprehension level. Throughout this action research project, the ESL teacher focused on increasing the three students phonemic awareness by studying word parts and their sounds in hopes of showing growth in each students' reading comprehension levels. The teacher felt that a focus on word families would be more beneficial than apply phonic and spelling rules in isolation as research by Cunningham & Hall (1994) shows that the brain is able to recognize patterns much more efficiently than it is able to apply

rules. This focus on patterns and their sounds allowed the ESL students to make generalities when applying their phonics and increase their spelling and reading accuracy.

Primary, intermediate, and ESL theories of word study instruction all have their separate goals. Primary level word study focuses on introducing beginning readers and writers to the English language and its structure. Intermediate word study continues the strategies introduced at the primary level as well as focuses on deeper content- are vocabulary and word etymology. Word study for ESL students applies the theories behind second language acquisition to help learners achieve a better understanding of the English language. By combining the essential skills from each of these three forms of word study, this project has shown that there is a link between these diverse forms of word study and that it benefits ESL students when word study is directly taught on a daily basis.

This action research study focuses on only three students, and therefore a case study was used for initial exploration of this topic. However for future studies, a control-experimental group design is recommended. A lack of control group prevents this study from providing evidence if word study is a better means of instructing students than teaching word sound and word parts in isolation, as per the district provided resources. We can see that ESL students' reading comprehension can grow at the expected rate, by making at least one year's growth according to the TELPAS rating system. The size of the research group is very small and therefore limits validity of the data collected. Would these interventions increase the reading comprehension levels of most ESL students? Do non-native students need separate instructional theories and practices for significant learning to take place? The end of February and the month of March put a strain on the project as TAKS preparations and testing caused the researcher to

miss some units of time with these students. Perhaps completing the project at a different time of year would have yielded even further growth.

A further limitation to this project is the manner in which the DRA II is administered to primary students per district requirements. At the intermediate level, students test on the DRA II until they reach their instructional level. Descriptors (from the DRA rubric) which fall in the instructional level “indicate that these students need models and demonstrations of what is expected and opportunities to learn and practice effective strategies and skills in order to become Independent.” (Beaver & Carter, Teacher Guide: DRA II: Developmental Reading Assessment, p.54) Descriptors within the Independent levels “suggest that these students are reading on level but would benefit from instruction that extends their thinking and responses.” (Beaver & Carter, Teacher Guide: DRA II: Developmental Reading Assessment, p.54) At the primary level of DRA II test administration, students stop on an independent level. Therefore, intermediate students who test from the primary kit do not always produce an instructional level score. The running records taken throughout this study were used to assess a student’s instructional level. The distinction between independent and instructional levels is important. For instance, instructional level refers to the level of text in which a student can not fully comprehend the text without teacher assistance. Independent level refers to the level of text in which a student can fully comprehend the story without any adult assistance. A student can be independent on a 10, and have DRA II testing stop. However, as a teacher, I do not know if the student could be independent on a 12, 14, etc. because I have not found the height of their independence. I only know that they can read that one particular level without assistance. However, once an instructional level is found, a teacher knows that a student is unable to read a higher level of text independently because they can not read the previous text independently. Knowing a student can

read independently at a 10, does not provide the teacher with a full picture of that student's capabilities as a reader. I feel that if students who were being tested on DRA levels below 10 were allowed to be assessed further (test on the next numeral test) if they scored at the independent level, the results of this action research project would show more growth. By assessing the students' instructional level according to the DRA II, this researcher feels that the DRA II scores would more closely match those taken during the running records. Despite these limitations, I feel that the data collected prompts further investigation as well as an incentive for further use of these instructional strategies with ESL students.

A continuation of this study would include a larger sample size as well as a control group. I would like to continue the project in this manor to better solidify the results that were obtained in this action research project. Following that data collection, I would then like to take a closer look at shared reading and writing techniques, which are also popular instructional strategies in the primary grades, to see if more significant gains can be made when combined with word study.

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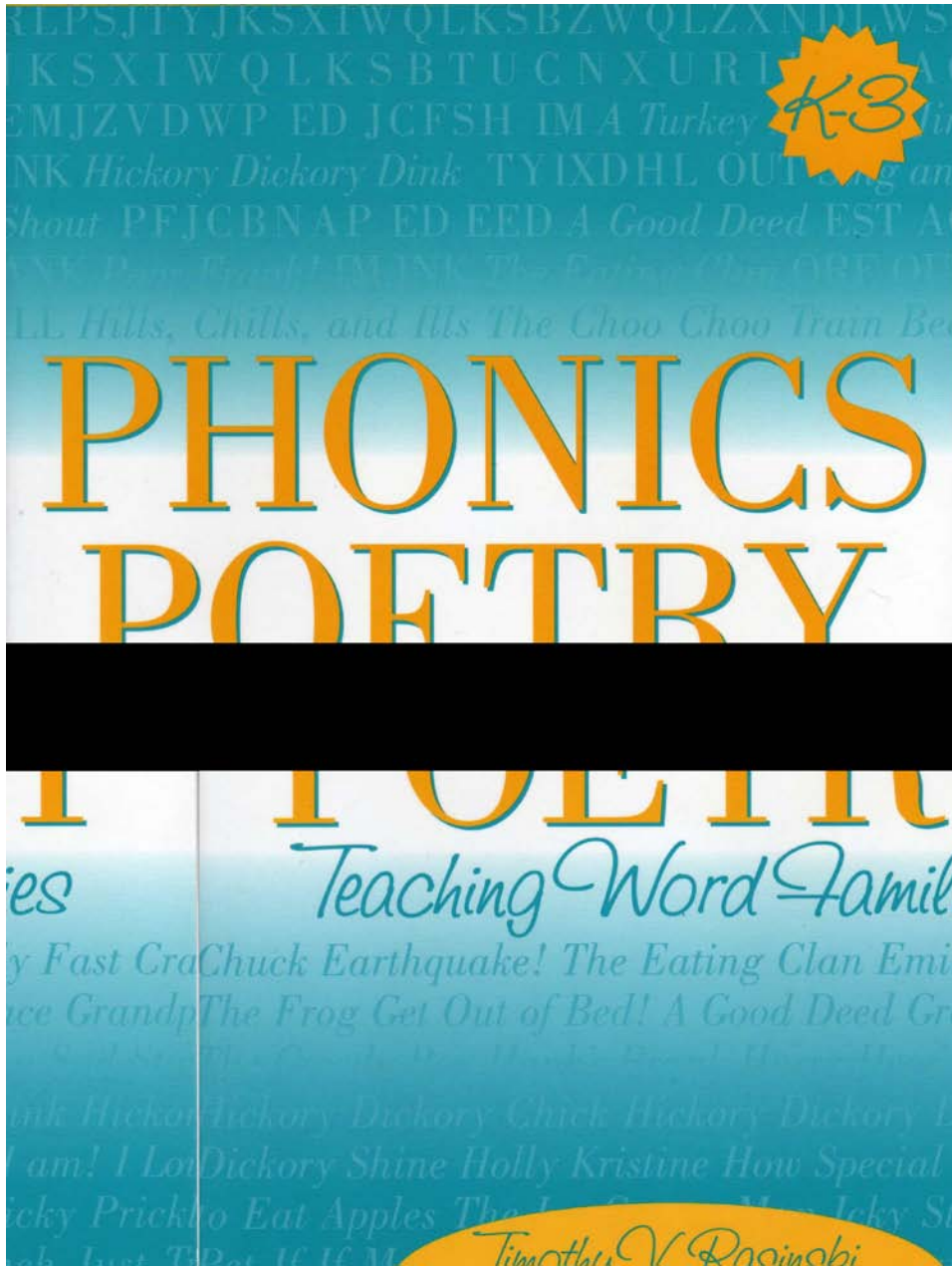
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Appendix A: *Phonics Poetry Resource*



Appendix B: Sample Pages from Phonics Poetry

Bikes

-ay

Bikes are to ride
All of the day
Places to go
So far away

Sidewalks and paths
Places to stray
Riding a bike
Is a great way to play.

—Greg Reagan

Word Bank Words

Bikes

day	play	places
away	way	sidewalks
stray	bikes	paths

Ways to Sort (categories):

① /ā/ words, ② plural words/ words ending with s (e.g., bikes), ③ words that contain a consonant blend, ④ /i/ words

Cloze Sentences:

1. The _____ cat was looking for a home.
2. Let's _____ tag at recess.
3. The opposite of "night" is _____.
4. We can ride our _____ to the park.
5. There are many _____ we can visit.

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Appendix C: Teacher Adaptation of Activities from Phonics Poetry

Grandpa

I call my grandpa “Pap.”
I like to sit on his lap.
He reads me good books,
and sometimes he cooks, and usually takes a long nap.

-Karen McGuigan Brothers



lap
looks
make

nap
takes
bike

books
like
cap

1. When I am tired I often take a _____.
2. It _____ like we will win this game.
3. I _____ to ride my bike.
4. The wind blew my _____ right off my head!
5. My mom can _____ the best pizzas.

Rasinski, Timothy V., and Belinda S. Zimmerman. Phonics Poetry Teaching Word Families. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2001.

Name:

**Grandpa
Word Sort**

-ap	-ook	-ake
-ike	Words with a silent e	Words that describe things a person can touch
Plural words		

Murphy  GRADES K-2

40 Wonderful Blend & Digraph Poems

A Delightful Collection of Poems With an Easy-to-Use Lesson Plan to Help Young Learners Build Key Phonics Skills

dr-

Dragon Dream

In my **d**reamy little **d**ream
a **d**ragon wore a **d**ress.
I **d**rove her in my jeep.
She really was impressed!

I **d**rugged her to the grocery store.
She didn't make a **d**ream.
She gave a little **d**ragon sigh
and **d**rifted off to sleep.

—Kama Einhorn



sh-

Shirley Shepherd

Shirley **S**hepherd counted **s**heep:
one **s**heep, two **s**heep, three **s**heep, four,
shuffling through her bedroom door.
And when **s**he drifted off to sleep,
she dreamed of those four **s**haggy **s**heep:
one **s**heep, two **s**heep, three **s**heep, four,
eating **s**hortcake off her floor!

—Brook Pieri



Every poem gives kids plenty of opportunities to see a blend or digraph in action!

compiled by Shelley Grant and Dana Haddad



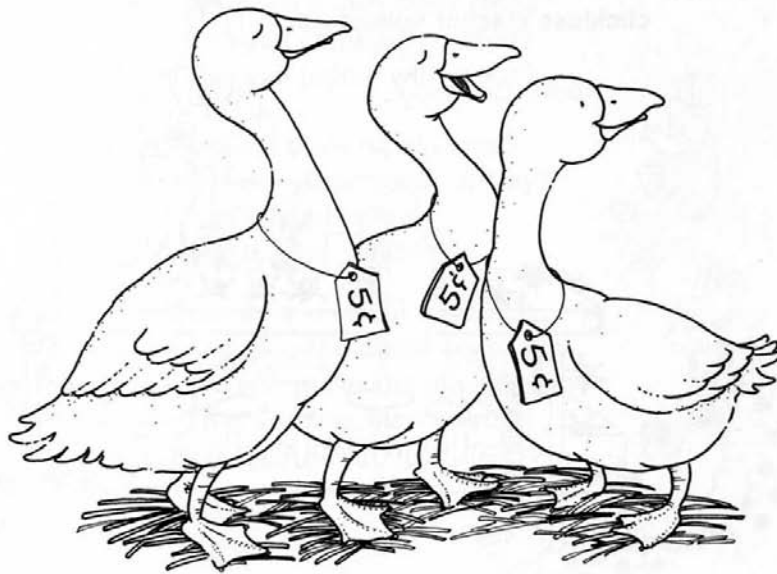
Appen
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Poem
from
40
Wond
erful
Blend
&
Digrap
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Poems

ch-

Chick, Chick, Chatterman

Chick, chick, chatterman,
How much are your geese?
Chick, chick, chatterman,
Five cents apiece.
Chick, chick, chatterman,
That's too dear.
Chick, chick, chatterman,
Get out of here!

-Traditional

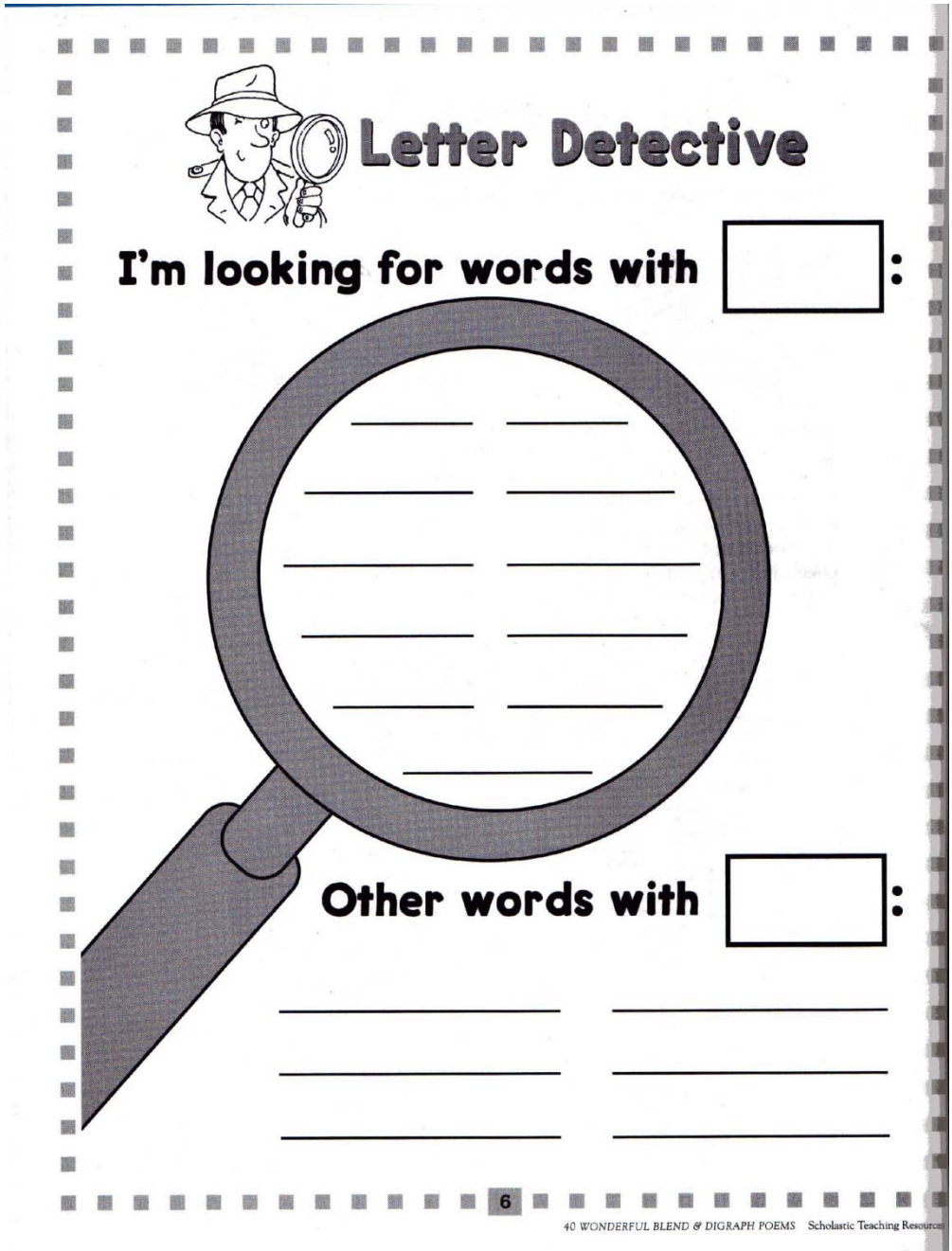


11

40 WONDERFUL BLEND & DIGRAPH POEMS Scholastic Teaching Resources

Grant, Shelley, and Dana Haddad. 40 Wonderful Blend Poems A Delightful Collection of Poems With an Easy-to-Use Lesson Plan to Help Young Learners Build Key Phonics Skills (Teaching Resources). Wilmington: Teaching Resources, 2005.

F: Sample Activity from 40 Wonderful Blend & Digraph Poems



The worksheet is titled "Letter Detective" and features a cartoon detective character wearing a hat and holding a magnifying glass. The main title "Letter Detective" is in a large, bold, sans-serif font. Below the title, there is a section for students to write a letter: "I'm looking for words with []:". To the right of the letter box is a colon. Below this section is a large magnifying glass graphic. Inside the lens of the magnifying glass are several horizontal lines for writing words. Below the magnifying glass, there is another section: "Other words with []:". To the right of this box is a colon. Below this section are more horizontal lines for writing words. At the bottom of the worksheet, there is a small number "6" and the text "40 WONDERFUL BLEND & DIGRAPH POEMS Scholastic Teaching Resources".

Grant, Shelley, and Dana Haddad. 40 Wonderful Blend Poems A Delightful Collection of Poems
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