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GUIDED READING INSTRUCTION AND MAKING WORDS

by  
Amanda Cavaliere

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Master of Arts Degree  
of  
The Graduate School  
at  
Rowan University  
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Approved by \_\_\_\_\_

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## ABSTRACT

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GUIDED READING INSTRUCTION AND MAKING WORDS  
2008-09  
Dr. S Jay Kuder  
Master of Arts in Learning Disabilities

The purpose of this study was to examine if the use of the Making Words strategy, when implemented during Guided Reading instruction in a first grade classroom, improves the decoding skills of first grade students with and without disabilities. The students were administered the Yopp-Singer Test of Phonemic Segmentation as a pretest and posttest of the study. The Making Words strategy was implemented at the conclusion of each guided reading lesson during a ten week period. There were 16 first grade students included in this study, four of whom had disabilities. The average number of words correctly segmented at the beginning of the study was 14 words and the average number of words correctly segmented at the end of the study was 18 words (an average increase of 38%). Implications of the study reveal that students who are more successful at segmenting sounds are better at decoding unknown words.

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

The heart and soul of a first grade classroom is literacy instruction. It comprises more than half of the day's instructional time and guides lessons throughout other curricular areas as well. For students with learning disabilities and struggling readers, this can be an overwhelming task. According to the Council for Exceptional Children, more than 50 percent of students receiving services for special education have a learning disability. This number equates to 5 to 10 percent of all children between the ages of 6 and 17 in the United States. According to the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL), there are five essential areas of reading instruction. The first of these five areas is phonemic awareness. Phonemic awareness is the building block upon which all other areas of reading instruction are built (phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension). Students with learning disabilities often lack knowledge of phonemic awareness and are then put at greater risk of reading failure.

Many school districts have adopted a balanced literacy program to implement reading instruction. One component of this program is guided reading. Guided reading instruction is instruction with small groups of children where the teacher supports students as they read books at their instructional level. Another component of this program is "word work" or "working with words." This component helps children develop phonological skills. In essence, guided reading instruction, where students are taught how to use strategies in small groups, and phonemic awareness instruction, where

students are taught sound relationships, are isolated from one another. However, knowing the integral role that phonemic awareness plays in reading instruction, it may be beneficial to combine these two facets of reading instruction. For children with learning disabilities, who already have difficulty carrying over skills from one setting to another, it is even more important that this connection be made for them. The earlier these two literacy components are combined, the more beneficial it should be for the students. Therefore, examining this entity within the context of a first grade classroom is essential.

One strategy that first grade students benefit from, with relation to phonemic awareness, is Making Words by Patricia Cunningham. This is a hands-on, high-energy, engaging strategy that teaches students letter-sound relationships and word patterns. This activity begins by the teacher choosing a “secret word” of five to eight letters in length. Students are given the letters on cards to spell the “secret word,” with consonants and vowels in different colors (usually consonants are black while vowels are red). The teacher guides the students into making words with these letters, beginning with two-letter words and increasing the number of letters in the word until the student spells the “secret word” with all of the letters. By the completion of the lesson, the students make 10 to 15 words with the letters. After making the words, the teacher displays the words on index cards and the students sort the words by rhyming words, initial sounds, word families, etc. This is an every-pupil-response activity that is multi-level. This strategy is usually taught with the whole class and the “secret words” are related to the curriculum (seasons, sports, animals, people).

Guided reading is a component of a literacy program where the teacher places students in flexible groups based on their abilities and instructional needs. In guided



reading the teacher selects texts for the groups to read that are at their instructional level. The teacher introduces the text to the group and sets a purpose for reading. Then the children read silently or quietly while the teacher listens to the students, observes what strategies the students are using, and offers guidance as needed by prompting the children at points of difficulty. After the students read the text, the group may have a discussion about the text, or the teacher may review a particular strategy that was beneficial while reading. It is at this point that an extension to the book may be used.

Making Words could be implemented after a reading of the guided reading text as an extension to the lesson. The teacher could choose a word from the text to lead the students in a brisk-paced Making Words lesson. To be most effective, phonemic awareness instruction, phonics instruction and spelling instruction should be closely linked to what the children are reading about (Cunningham and Hall, 1994). Therefore, a natural way to do this would be to incorporate a strategy already used in the classroom (Making Words) with a component of the literacy program already in place (Guided Reading).

#### Statement of the Problem and Hypothesis

It is the purpose of this paper to discover if the use of the Making Words strategy, when implemented during Guided Reading instruction, improves the decoding skills of first grade students with learning disabilities and students without disabilities. It is my hypothesis that integrating Making Words into a guided reading lesson will improve the decoding skills of children with learning disabilities. Making Words will provide the beneficial practice of matching sounds with letters, creating and reading word patterns, and developing rhyming skills, which are all fundamental to phonemic awareness

development. When linked to a specific guided reading text, this will be established in a meaningful way, and therefore, allowing more transfer of the skills to occur.

### Summary

In summary, children with learning disabilities have difficulty learning to read and comprehend phonological skills. Making Words is a strategy that, in conjunction with guided reading lessons, will help children with and without learning disabilities improve decoding skills. I also expect that using Making Words in the small group settings will allow instruction to be more individualized and help children to generalize their word knowledge to more difficult words as the text levels increase. Because the use of guided reading instruction is used in many classrooms, other teachers will benefit from the easy-to-implement technique of Making Words when helping their students learn to read. Implications for this study could be that fewer children will experience difficulty learning to read and fewer children will need special education services for language arts.

## CHAPTER II

### Literature Review

Combining guided reading instruction with phonological awareness instruction should provide multiple benefits to children, especially children who are at-risk for reading difficulties or who already have a learning disability. The purpose of this chapter is to present the literature and research on guided reading, phonological awareness and early literacy instruction.

Guided reading is a component of a literacy program where children develop individual reading skills within a group setting as set forth by Fountas and Pinnell. The teacher acts as a guide to the children as they read texts chosen to be at their instructional reading levels. This enables children to learn how to use strategies as they read for meaning. This strategy is used in many elementary classrooms throughout the world. It is beneficial for children without learning disabilities and it is also used in classrooms where children do have learning disabilities. However, it does have limitations, especially for children with learning disabilities. The strengths and weaknesses of guided reading will be discussed in this chapter.

Patricia Antonacci (2000) examined the use of guided reading with beginning readers. She reviewed the perspective of Vygotsky--that learning is social, mediated by language and students learn best when they learn in their zone of proximal development. Each of these standards set forth by Vygotsky is met through guided reading instruction. Here children are placed in dynamic, flexible groups where they are reading at their

instructional level, while discussing the books and strategies with other readers. Her review of this research validates the necessity of guided reading for early readers.

Antonacci analyzed the use of guided reading combined with direct instruction when teaching beginning readers. She highlighted that in direct instruction children are grouped according to their ability levels and usually stay with the same group throughout the academic year. Therefore, the low ability readers remain the low ability readers for the entire year. However, in guided reading, although the children are grouped according to instructional need, the groups change throughout the school year depending on the need of each child. In guided reading, the groupings are more needs-based and student-centered, rather than teacher-centered in direct instruction. For beginning readers, the need for more flexible grouping is essential when using guided reading and when teaching phonemic awareness, and this prevents children from remaining in one stagnant group for the entire school year (Antonacci, 2000).

According to Vaughn, Hughes, Moody and Elbaum (2001), the grouping of students that teachers use for reading instruction is critical for the effectiveness of instruction. Research was reviewed by the authors to examine the effectiveness of reading instruction in whole class, small group, pairs and one-on-one settings. It was noted that while each type of grouping has benefits and drawbacks, small group instruction provides the most opportunities for instructional conversations, again supporting Vygotskian theory. In a meta-analysis on reading outcomes of students with disabilities, small groups yielded the highest effect sizes. Small flexible groups allow teachers to provide intense, explicit and meaningful instruction to all students, with and

without disabilities. Teachers can utilize small group instruction within the guided reading setting (Vaughn et al., 2001).

Schwartz (2005) examined the types of decisions teachers make when responding to students during guided reading instruction. He noted that children who struggle with reading have difficulty changing their use of strategies when reading without direct instruction from the teacher. Children may have word knowledge, but fail to use it in the context of reading. He stated that isolated phonics instruction can prohibit performance because children are unable to make the connections themselves between phonological knowledge and decoding unknown words. Therefore, educators need to assist children in using their knowledge about phonics when they come to words they do not know. (Schwartz, 2005).

Guided reading instruction has limitations in this area, especially for children with learning disabilities. Phonological awareness is an important instructional component that children with learning disabilities need to acquire. Children need to receive phonological instruction that is purposefully linked to the text they are reading. The benefits are twofold: a connection is made to phonics and decoding skills could become improved. Making Words, a strategy by Patricia Cunningham, links phonological skills to other instructional areas. Making Words teaches phonetic skills by breaking one word into several smaller words and then sorting the smaller words by specific sounds or word parts. It could easily be incorporated into a guided reading lesson, by choosing a word from the text, to use to make other words. This combination of strategies would make up for some of the shortcomings of guided reading instruction for children with learning disabilities who need more explicit instruction.

Adel Aiken (2002) spent time working with a first grade teacher and observed students using the Making Words strategy by Patricia Cunningham. She reported that students were engaged and challenged at many levels by this hands-on approach. Students who needed more assistance were scaffolded by the teacher's directions, and students who were better decoders were able to build more difficult words with less assistance. Her observation was with a class using this strategy all together, but it could easily be adapted to fit into a small group lesson, such as a guided reading lesson, and be most beneficial to all students (Adel, 2002).

Klingner, Vaughn, Hughes, and Arguelles (1999) examined the instructional practices of teachers over a yearlong study. One of the instructional practices was Making Words, by Patricia Cunningham. Of the seven teachers involved in the study, there were four general education teachers, two special education teachers and one enrichment teacher. Each teacher had students with learning disabilities in his or her classroom and had received professional development in instructional strategies three years prior to this study. This was a follow-up to the earlier study in which teachers were instructed on using three different multilevel instructional practices with their students (partner-reading, collaborative strategic reading and Making Words). It was investigated what types of instructional practices helped all students and aided the teachers' procedures and routines best as well. A strategy is only as good as the teacher who is willing to use it.

The effectiveness of the strategies was not noted, however, data was collected in the form of interviews, Likert-type scales, and classroom observations to assess the teachers' uses of the strategies. Intervention Validity Checklists were used to assess how

the teachers used the strategies over time. The results of the study indicated that the teachers continued the use of Making Words, although some changed the format to fit into the needs of their classrooms better. For example, one teacher skipped the easier words to spend more time on the more challenging words of the lesson. It should be noted that Making Words allows flexibility by teachers to implement it in the most effective way for each individual classroom, as classroom needs vary. Finally, this study was done as a response to the increase of special education children in regular education classrooms and the need to find instructional strategies to benefit all children (Klingner et al., 1999).

Lane, Pullen, Eisele and Jordan (2002) addressed phonological awareness research as far as its development, implications for classroom instruction, and ways to assess phonological awareness skills in beginning readers. Phonological awareness is related to reading ability and deficits in one correlate with deficits in the other. Children with learning disabilities often have difficulty with phonological awareness and it is important to find meaningful ways to link this instruction with the curriculum.

Early language is critical to the development of phonological awareness, as well as early intervention when there are concerns with phonological awareness. Skills in phonological awareness typically develop in a sequential manner with the ability to rhyme occurring first, followed by phoneme detection, phoneme deletion, blending and finally, segmentation. Explicit instruction usually needs to be given in the later areas. For this reason, Making Words would provide perfectly the instruction in the more difficult skills of early readers. Phonological awareness precedes a child's ability to decode words. Further research reviewed noted that teachers should strive to include

phonological awareness instruction into a preexisting reading program; this will ensure that the instruction will be meaningful and connected to the curriculum. Therefore, when a classroom is already using guided reading instruction, as many already are, this would be a natural setting for this type of instruction to occur (Lane et al., 2002).

Children with reading disabilities encounter several problems when they learn to read. These problems very often include difficulties with phonological awareness and the ability to segment and blend sounds. Although there is not one correct instructional strategy to help these children learn to read, there is evidence of factors that contribute to reading success. Combining guided reading instruction with Making Words may be one strategy when teaching students to read.

A study by Vellutino, Fletcher, Snowling and Scanlon (2004) reviewed literature over the past four decades about specific reading disabilities, particularly dyslexia. The research reviewed stated that an inadequate use of word identification skills, because of basic deficits in alphabetic coding, is the primary cause in children who have difficulty learning to read. Other causes found were deficiencies in phonological awareness skills and evidence also supports that inadequate instruction or a lack of experience of the student also take part in a child's difficulty when learning to read. Making Words could be a proponent for closing the gap in phonological awareness skills while providing teachers with more adequate instruction for these skills (Vellutino et al., 2004).

Another study that examined similar intensive support to struggling readers was conducted by Torgesen, Alexander, Wagner, Rashotte, Voeller and Conway (2001). In this study 60 children with severe reading disabilities between the ages of eight and ten



were chosen and assigned to two instructional programs that included effective instruction in phonemic awareness and decoding skills. In this study, each child received 67.5 hours of one-on-one instruction within two 50-minute sessions each day over eight weeks. Both of the groups yielded large improvements in reading skills. Within one year after the interventions, 40% of the children who participated were no longer in need of special education services. Although this study focused on children already diagnosed with reading disabilities, not regular education students, it very clearly points to the need of excellent phonological awareness instruction in young students. The approach to instruction once again did not make a difference to the outcome of the study, but what was taught did. Early, intense phonological awareness instruction can make a difference for many children (Torgesen et al., 2001).

Vellutino, Scanlon, Small and Fanuele (2006) examined interventions for students with and without reading disabilities. Prior to kindergarten children were identified as at risk for reading difficulties. Half of the children received small-group instruction two or three times each week during kindergarten while the other half of the children received remedial assistance in their regular home school. The children were reassessed before first grade and children who continued to have difficulty received one-on-one daily tutoring or the remedial assistance offered by the home school. The results of the study showed that kindergarten intervention or kindergarten and first grade intervention were helpful to prevent reading difficulties in most at risk students. The conclusion was then drawn by the authors that most children with reading difficulties have such because of deficits in experience or instruction, rather than cognitive deficits. While causes may be

uncertain, it is once again recognized that the earlier the intervention with phonological skills is started, the more positive the outcome for the child (Vellutino et al., 2006).

Pressley, Roehrig, Bogner, Raphael and Dolezal (2002) surveyed primary-grade teachers about literacy instruction practices. Teachers for the survey were sought out carefully as reading supervisors were asked to nominate one first and one second-grade teacher who were effective in helping their students to become readers and writers. The nominated teachers were asked to identify ten instructional practices that were essential to literacy instruction. Combined, teachers named more than 300 practices in this first phase of the survey. The second phase of the survey was a more specific questionnaire about the 300 named practices. The results of this survey concluded that these effective primary-grade teachers did many different things in their classrooms to help develop literacy skills. All of the teachers were balancing components of whole language instruction with skills instruction.

A follow-up survey was conducted with these teachers one year later asking these same teachers to report on teaching struggling beginning readers. However, the response to this survey reported that overall, instruction for struggling readers was not much different than instruction to other students, it was just more extensive and intensive. The researchers also observed and interviewed some of these teachers. Results showed that teachers combined skills instruction with reading instruction and students who did the best were able to integrate the skills instruction, teachers used skill-oriented mini-lessons, and scaffolding. Guided reading and Making Words are components of the balanced literacy program that many of the effective teachers discussed in this study. When used

together specific reading skills are embedded in guided reading instruction with teacher modeling and scaffolding as needed (Pressley et al., 2002).

O'Donnell, Enrico, and Spear (2005) conducted a similar survey with teachers of grades one, three and five in Maine. This survey was taken during the 2004-2005 school year to discover trends in literacy instruction. A similar study was done during the 1993-94 school year. At each of the three grade levels 125 teachers were randomly chosen to participate. Eighty percent of first grade teachers reported using guided reading as their primary approach to teaching reading. About 15% of first grade teachers reported using a skills management phonics-based program. With the discrepancy between these two percentages, a conclusion can be drawn that with fewer and fewer teachers using a phonics program, phonics instruction is integrated into other areas of literacy instruction. It can be proposed that at least a portion of the teachers who do not use the purchased phonics program are including this type of instruction during guided reading, a natural place for it to happen (O'Donnell et al., 2005).

Mathes, Denton, Fletcher, Anthony, Francis, and Schatschneider (2005) examined the combination of enhanced classroom instruction with intense supplemental interventions for struggling first grade readers. The study was conducted in six schools over two years. There were two interventions used, Proactive Reading and Responsive Reading, and they were used with groups of first grade students who were at risk for reading difficulties. A third group of students only received enhanced classroom instruction.

The results showed that first graders who were considered at risk for reading difficulties and received either supplemental program scored higher on measures of reading than students who only receive enhanced classroom instruction. However, enhanced classroom instruction did help at risk children as well. It was also noted that instruction in phonemic awareness, phonemic decoding, fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, spelling and writing needs to be explicit and intensive (in small groups) for students at risk for reading difficulties. Therefore, enhanced classroom instruction is a good start for helping struggling readers, but it is not alone enough. Extra instruction is necessary for at risk students to acquire the skills necessary to be successful readers. Making Words can be that supplemental instruction, used in tandem with guided reading to assist struggling readers (Mathes et al., 2005).

Denton, Fletcher, Anthony and Francis (2006) evaluated the effects of a decoding intervention on students with reading difficulties and disabilities. Twenty seven students were included in this study, with 14 of them showing inadequate responses to tiers one and two in reading instruction. All of the students received a 16-week intervention which included decoding and fluency skills. The decoding portion of the intervention occurred for two hours a day for eight weeks, while the fluency intervention was one hour per day for eight weeks.

At the end of the 16 weeks, students showed improvement in decoding, fluency and comprehension. Twelve of the students showed a significant response to the interventions. While these results appear to be promising, it is rare that a first grade teacher is able to provide such intense interventions over such a long period of time to her struggling readers. It is not realistic that this type of assistance can take place in an

everyday classroom. Additionally, there were still 15 students who did not respond significantly to the intervention. At what point are the services delivered more similar to special education services? The framework that the research of this paper is trying to adhere to is one where first grade teachers can assist students to the best of their ability, time and talents within the regular school day (Denton et al., 2006).

Suzanne Reading and Dana Van Deuren (2007) assessed literacy skills of first grade children from two groups. Ninety two children enrolled in kindergarten were studied over two school years. One group received phonemic awareness instruction in kindergarten and the other group did not. Using the DIBELS, at the beginning of first grade, the group who received the phonemic awareness instruction in kindergarten scored higher and had fewer children with reading difficulties than the second group. However, by the middle of first grade, both of the groups scored comparable to one another. The authors concluded that phonemic awareness instruction assists in learning first grade reading material, and phonemic awareness can be learned within a short period of time. Therefore, if children missed out on learning these skills in kindergarten or earlier, first grade is not too late to begin. First grade may also appear to be the optimal time to introduce and reinforce these skills as they complement the typical first grade curriculum (Reading and Van Deuren, 2007).

Martin, Martin, and Carvalho (2008) examined a limited amount of research about learning styles of reading for students with learning disabilities, as well as the neurological and psychological aspects of development. This research was conducted because of the increase in the number of children who are classified with a learning disability and the lack of research in this field. There is a need for reading instruction to

match the individual needs of each child and the reading programs previously reviewed (whole-language and direct instruction) do not meet this criteria. Information processing is also a concern of children with learning disabilities which can interfere with phonological aspects of learning to read. Auditory and visual processing as well as a lack of vocabulary are all concerns as well. The research posed that there is not one instructional program that is best for all students with learning disabilities. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to continue to find effective strategies for classroom use (Martin et al., 2008).

Al Otaiba and Fuchs (2006) conducted a study to identify characteristics that predict responsiveness and nonresponsiveness to effective instruction in early literacy. They studied 104 children, including seven of whom had special needs, in kindergarten and first grade. After two years, the students were evaluated again to determine if they were responsive or nonresponsive to the instruction they received in kindergarten and first grade, kindergarten only, first grade only, or neither year. Teachers were trained to use reading interventions in their classrooms. The prevention of reading difficulties was guiding this study as the gap between students reading on level and students reading below level widens as children get older.

The study identified seven categories of characteristics associated with nonresponsiveness, the first category being phonological awareness. Nonresponders at the end of kindergarten tested in the lowest 30<sup>th</sup> percentile of students and they could not segment as many phonemes or identify as many letter-sounds in one minute as their peers. However, when children were exposed to well-implemented, explicit intervention focusing on phonological awareness, the number of children at risk for reading problems

can be reduced. Further noted was the need for programs that assist children with learning needs, programs that are multilevel. Making Words could be considered such a program to help children be more responsive to instruction (Al Otaiba and Fuchs, 2006).

Throughout the literature and research several themes emerged upon this topic of combining guided reading instruction with phonological awareness instruction with the use of Making Words. First, Response to Intervention (RTI) is becoming a more prevalent term when identifying children with special education needs. Because of RTI, there is a need for more instructional programs to meet the needs of struggling readers. These programs need to be multilevel and able to be used in a classroom by a regular education teacher. Because guided reading is so readily implemented, Making Words could be one approach to enhancing classroom instruction and could be used with students of all abilities.

A second noticeable theme is that the research supports instruction in a small group setting for children with and without learning disabilities. Guided reading provides the small group setting to allow instruction to be more strategic. Finally, it was repeated in several reports that there has been no one approach that best meets the needs of all struggling readers. The manner in which struggling readers and typical students are taught tend to be the same, with a minor adjustment in the amount of intensity and support given. Therefore, combining Making Words with guided reading creates one more avenue for teachers to venture down in order to meet the needs of all of their students.

## CHAPTER III

### Methodology

#### Subjects

The subjects of this study were all first grade students who attended an elementary school in Southern New Jersey. There were a total of 16 students in the study. The mean age of the students at the beginning of the study was six years old, with a range from six to seven years old. There were five female students in the class and eleven male students. Three children were already classified with disabilities. One child in the class was in the process of being evaluated by the child study team for special education services when the study began, and became eligible for special education services after the study was completed. One of the other classified students began the study and then his IEP was changed and he was moved to a pull-out resource setting on February 20, 2009. Therefore, he did not receive the same amount of time in this study; however, he did receive the same amount of lessons as the other children. The children were assigned a number for data collection purposes and confidentiality. The specific information for each child can be found in Table 3.1.



Table 3.1, Subjects

Number	Age	Gender	Race	Number of Guided Reading lessons	Disability
1	6 yrs.	M	White	17	None
2	6 yrs.	M	White	16	None
3	6 yrs.	F	White	16	None
4	6 yrs.	M	White	18	LD
5	6yrs.	F	White	20	LD
6	6-7yrs.	M	White	19	None
7	6-yrs.	F	White	19	None
8	6yrs.	M	White	19	None
9	6yrs	M	White	19	None
10	6-7yrs.	F	White	19	None
11	6yrs.	M	White	18	None
12	6yrs.	M	White	17	None
13	6yrs.	M	White	25	LD (classified 3-20-09)
14	6yrs.	F	White	17	None
15*	6-7yrs.	M	White	19	LD
16	6 yrs.	M	White	19	None

\*This child was moved to a pull-out resource setting. He did not remain in the study for the same amount of time as the rest of the class, but he did receive the same amount of lessons.

## Setting

The school where the research was conducted is located in a suburban community in southern New Jersey. The school has approximately 500 students with four classes at each grade level. There are four resource and inclusion teachers who service children with specific learning disabilities. Also included in the school population are children with multiple disabilities and autism. There are five self-contained classes with students with multiple disabilities and three self-contained classes for children with autism. The children in these classes join the regular education classes at their grade levels for homeroom, lunch and related arts.

The classroom where this research was conducted was a regular education class with children with disabilities included for the entire school day. A special education teacher co-taught with the regular education teacher during the language arts block. A teacher assistant was present during math instruction. For all other portions of the school day, only the regular education teacher was present. Three children from the first grade MD class join this class for homeroom, lunch and related arts.

## Method

At the beginning of this research, each child was individually assessed on his or her ability to segment phonemes. The Yopp-Singer Test of Phoneme Segmentation created by Dr. Hallie Kay Yopp (1988), was used for this assessment. This tool was administered individually to each child in a quiet setting and took about five minutes to complete. It is a game-like assessment where a child was asked to segment a word into phonemes (for example the word “old” would be segmented as “o-l-d”). There are 22

items on the test, including words with blends (such as “gr”) and digraphs (such as “sh”). Children who answer all or almost all of the items correctly are considered to be phonemically aware. Children who answer some of the items correctly have emerging phonemic awareness skills. Finally, children who answer few or none of the items correctly do not have appropriate levels of phonemic awareness and these children are considered to be at risk for having difficulties with reading and spelling.

Once each child’s ability to segment sounds was gathered, this data was used as a baseline for the study. The children were previously placed in guided reading groups that read texts at their instructional levels. The children had been receiving guided reading instruction since the middle of October. There were five guided reading groups in the classroom and each group met for instruction twice each week with the teacher. The guided reading lessons typically lasted from 20 to 30 minutes, depending on the length of the book and the number of children in each group. The smallest group had two children, and the largest group had four children.

During a guided reading lesson, the children began by rereading the book from their previous guided reading lesson. Then the new text was introduced by the teacher. The teacher discussed difficult vocabulary in the text, reviewed strategies for decoding and set the purpose for reading. The group took a “picture walk” and discussed what they noticed in the pictures, the names of the characters, and corrected any misinterpretations the students may have from the pictures. After the picture walk, each child read his or her text in a quiet voice or silently. During this time the teacher listened to one child at a time, and took anecdotal notes on the use of strategies and areas of difficulty. These notes guided the text selection and strategy instruction for the follow-up discussion and

next guided reading lesson. The children may have read the text more than once. After reading the text, the teacher had a discussion with the group about the meaning of the text and the difficult words. It is after this point that an extension to the lesson was added to link phonological awareness instruction during guided reading.

Phonological awareness instruction was integrated into these guided reading lessons to enhance the students' abilities with phonemic awareness as well as decoding. This instruction was given through the use of the Making Words strategy by Patricia Cunningham. In this strategy one word was selected from the text and the students used magnetic letters from the letters in the word to build many words. For example, if the guided reading text was about winter, winter may be the secret word for the lesson. The children were given the letters in the word winter. The teacher guided the students in making word with those letters, starting with two letter words and building to the secret word (we, it, in, win, tin, net, wet, went, winter). As each word was built, the teacher displayed a copy of the word on an index card and placed it in a pocket chart. After all of the words had been made, the group read the words and then sorted words for certain patterns (words with the "in" chunk). This activity reinforced letter-sound relationships, blending and segmenting sounds, word patterns and word reading.

The materials used in this study include leveled guided reading texts, magnetic letters, magnetic boards, index cards and a pocket chart. There was some teacher preparation involved with the Making Words portion of this study, as words needed to be chosen and written when the guided reading lessons were planned. Prior to the lesson, the teacher chose a "secret word" from the guided reading text and wrote a list of words that could be made using the letters from the "secret word." The teacher then wrote the

words on index cards and arranged the words in order from the smallest words to the “secret word” as the final word. The teacher then gathered the corresponding magnetic letters each child would need to spell the “secret word.” After the students read and discussed the guided reading text, each child was given his or her own set of magnetic letters and a magnetic board. The teacher directed the group through the Making Words lesson and posted each new word, previously listed on an index card, in a small pocket chart. After all of the words had been made with the magnetic letters, the children helped the teacher sort the words by similar phonetic sounds.

There were 48 possible school days while the study was conducted beginning on January 5, 2009, and concluding on March 23, 2009. Two of the days the school closed for snow and two other days were special days where guided reading was not taught (100<sup>th</sup> day of school, Read Across America). Therefore, there were 44 school days when guided reading was used. Each child received between 16 and 25 guided reading lessons using the Making Words strategy during the study. After the study ended the Yopp-Singer Test of Phonemic Segmentation was administered again to each child to track progress made with phonological awareness. Growth was analyzed between the two scores on the assessments, as well as which sounds were most difficult, and where improvement could be noted (for example, were all the words with blends incorrect before, but now correct).

## CHAPTER IV

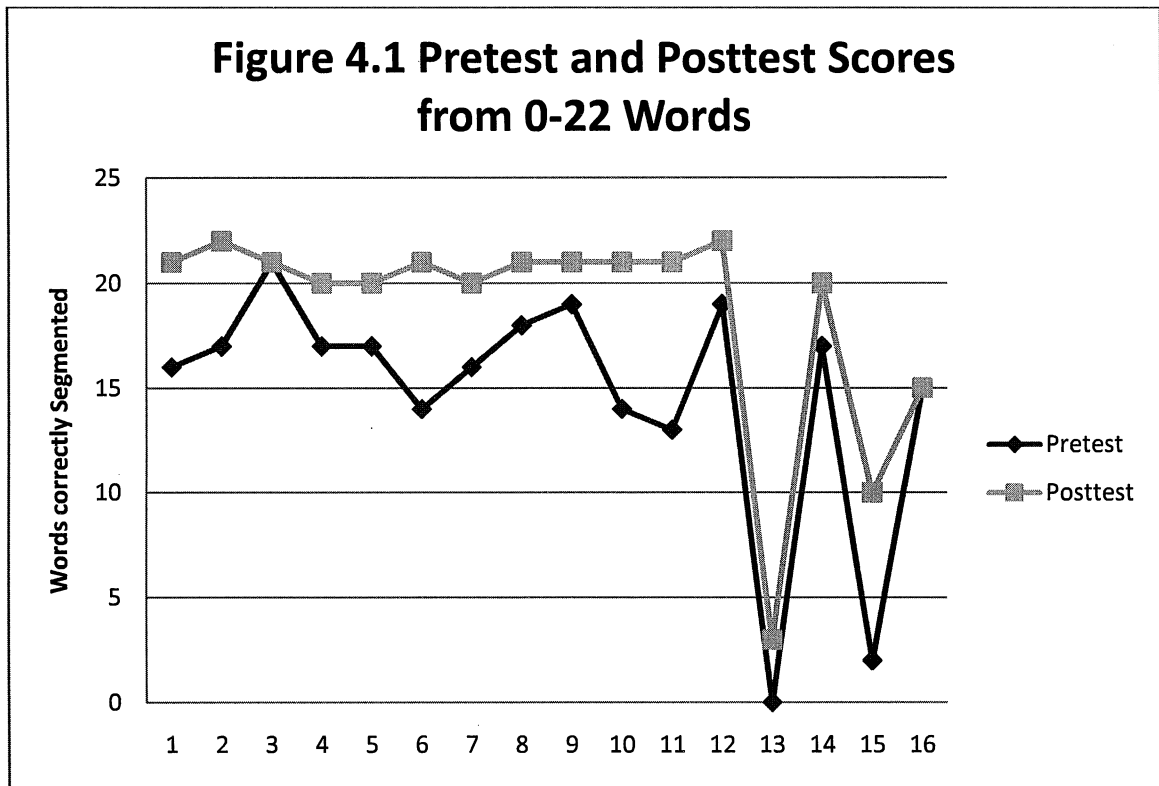
### Findings

This study examined whether the use of the Making Words strategy within a guided reading lesson in a first grade classroom would improve the decoding skills of the students with and without learning disabilities. Students were assessed on their knowledge about phonemic awareness, specifically sound segmentation, because this is a foundational skill for decoding words. Students were administered the Yopp-Singer Test of Phonemic Segmentation (1988) on two occasions. The first time the test was administered was before the use of Making Words in guided reading lessons, and the second administration occurred after ten weeks of the use of Making Words during Guided Reading sessions. Each child received between 16 and 25 guided reading lessons within this time period. It was my hypothesis that the use of Making Words during guided reading instruction would improve the decoding skills of first grade students because Making Words would help to develop phonemic awareness in a meaningful, small group setting.

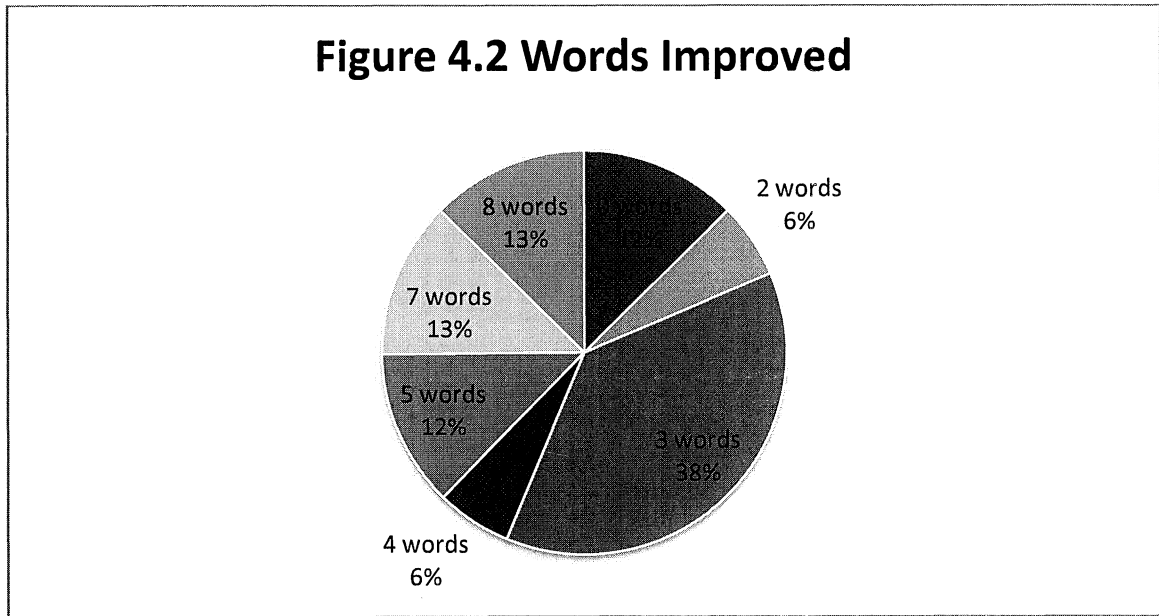
The range of guided reading lessons students received during the study was 16-25. The average number of lesson received was 18. The two students who received the fewest number of lessons (16) were both absent from school for an entire week during the study. The student who received the most number of lessons (25) scored the lowest on the pretest and was being evaluated during the study for special education services. The Yopp-Singer Test of Phonemic Segmentation was used as the pretest and posttest for this

study. On the pretest, the range of scores was 0-22 (with 22 being the most points possible). The average score correct was 14 words. On the posttest, the range of words correct was 3-22. The average score was 18 words. When comparing the pretest and posttest scores for each student, there was a range of 0-8 words improved, and an average of 4 words improved.

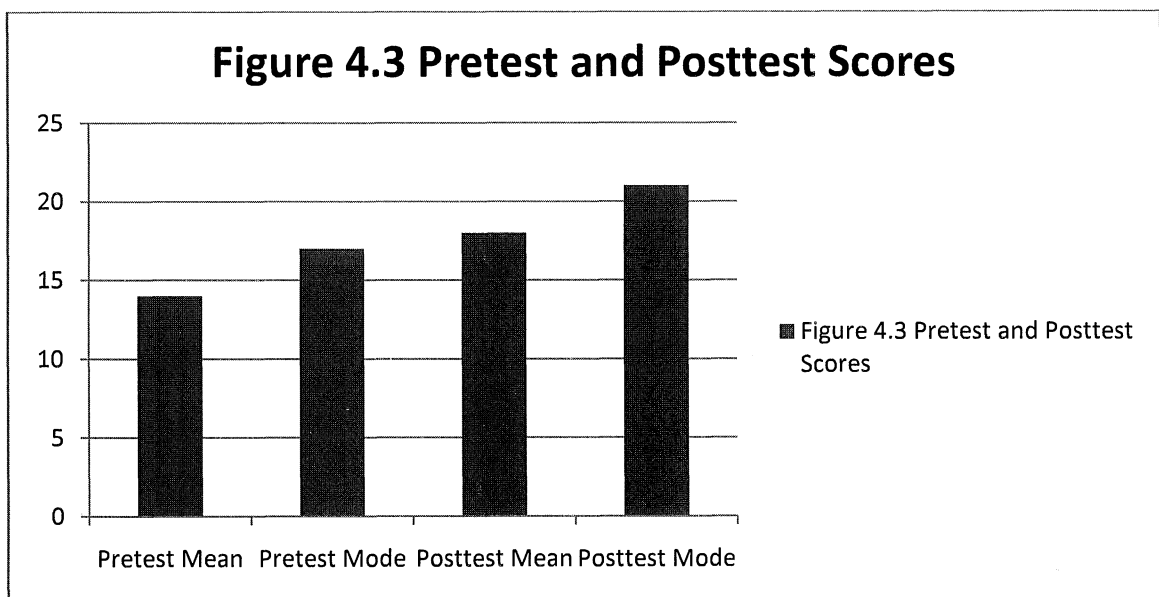
In Figure 4.1, a comparison is shown between pretest and posttest scores for each student. It should be noted that all children made improvements between the two test administrations, with the exception of two students. Student 3 and student 16 received the same score on both administrations. Even student 13, who did not segment one sound correctly on the pretest, still made progress on the posttest.



The number of words improved is presented in Figure 4.2. The range of points improved is 0-8 with an average of 4 words improved and a mode of 3. It can be seen that the largest percentage of children scored with an improvement of 3 words.



Finally, Figure 4.3 illustrates the difference of the mean and mode between the two test administrations. An increase of both the pretest means and modes is noticed.





## CHAPTER V

### Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

#### Summary

This study examined the effect of the Making Words strategy implemented during guided reading to improve the decoding skills of first grade students. There were 16 students included in this study. All of the students were either six or seven years old and in an inclusion first grade classroom. Four of the students included in this study had learning disabilities and therefore, a special education teacher also provided instruction during the language arts portion of the school day. The children were exposed to the Making Words strategy during guided reading lessons over a 10 week time period and each child received between 16 and 25 lessons on Making Words. The students were given the Yopp-Singer Test of Phonemic Segmentation (1988) as a pretest and posttest to the study to monitor progress with sound segmentation, a foundational skill to decoding words. This study found that students improved in their ability to segment sounds and thus decode and spell words more effectively as a result of incorporating Making Words with guided reading instruction.

#### Conclusions

The results indicated that all but two children involved in this study improved on their sound segmentation ability. Those two students who did not show improvement scored the same on both screenings. There was one student who did not segment any

sounds correctly on the pretest, but was able to segment three sounds on the posttest, which was the mode for words improved between the two screenings. Additionally, when comparing the mean and mode of the pretest to the mean and mode of the posttest, improvement is noted class wide. Finally, over a ten week period 38% of the class increased their scores by an average of four words. The small group, meaningful instruction that the combination of Making Words and guided reading provided for students was an effective setting for student learning. Also, through teacher observation, it was noticed that the spelling ability of the students improved during the course of this study. Spelling always improves as the school year progresses, however, from general observations it was noticed that students appeared to be able to break words apart more easily and match a sound with the correct written letter.

The ability to segment sounds is a foundational skill to learning to decode words. Therefore, an improvement in sound segmentation should correlate to an improvement in word decoding, as implied by this study. After reviewing a study by Schwartz (2005), it was noted that struggling students have difficulty changing their strategy use without direct instruction when reading and isolated phonics instruction can prohibit student performance because it does not connect phonological knowledge and decoding in a meaningful way. The Making Words strategy did link phonological knowledge to literature because the teacher always chose words from the text as the “secret word” to break apart and build from in the lesson. This word choice was relevant to the students after they read the text containing the “secret word.”

According to another study by Lane, Pullen, Eisele and Jordan (2002), phonological awareness is related to reading ability and children with learning disabilities

who have deficits in one area are likely to have these deficits in the other as well.

Furthermore, skills in phonological awareness develop sequentially, with sound segmentation (as assessed on the Yopp-Singer Test of Phonemic Segmentation), as the last of these skills to develop. Therefore, first grade is the correct time to target this skill with instruction that is connected in a relevant way to the curriculum, as in Making Words.

Finally, a third study by Vaughn, Hughes, Moody and Elbaum (2001) examined the grouping of students for reading instruction. It was noted that small group instruction provided the highest effect sizes for students with disabilities in a meta-analysis. Guided reading provides the grouping environment necessary for instructing students with learning disabilities, and as noted the previous two students; the Making Words strategy makes the phonological instruction meaningful to the student.

Within this study there were several problems that were encountered. First, there was a limitation in the study with the sample size and makeup. There were only 16 students involved in the study. All of the students were from the same classroom and they were all the same race, Caucasian. The homogeneity of the group makes it difficult to generalize the results for other students of other races, cultures, and locations. There were also two teachers implementing the Making Words strategy with guided reading instruction. The majority of the instruction was given by me, the regular classroom teacher. However, a special education teacher did provide some of the guided reading instruction to the students. Even though we were both implementing the same strategy to guided reading groups, every teacher uses strategies differently and therefore, it cannot be assumed that every guided reading lesson was identical for all students.

Of course during the study there were extraneous circumstances to take into account, such as student absences on their days of guided reading instruction. It was the best intention that each child received guided reading instruction twice each week. If a child was absent and it was possible to take that child's group on a different day; that was done. However, if a child was absent for multiple days, the group met without him or her, so as not to disrupt the instruction of the other children in the group. This happened with two particular students who were absent for an entire week of school. There were also two students who had significantly lower scores on the Yopp-Singer pretest and these children received guided instruction more frequently than the rest of the class.

#### Recommendations

If the study were to be replicated, there may be a few changes that could be made to improve the quality of the study. First, I think it would have been more beneficial to conduct the study earlier in the school year. It was conducted in January through mid-March of a school year. However, I think students may have shown greater improvement if the study was conducted in the late fall to early winter (November/December through spring). At the earlier time in a first grade classroom students are still developing the phonological skills and their pretest scores may not be as high as they were for this study, therefore, more growth could be noted. Also, if the study was started earlier in the school year, it could have continued for a longer amount of time. It would have been helpful to have taught more guided reading lessons during the course of the study. With student absences, events at school and weather delays, the best effort was made to instruct all children equally with the same number of guided reading lessons, but there were

differences in the number of lessons students received and this could have skewed the results as well. It may have been beneficial to chart growth over a longer period of time.

This study looks at the effectiveness of using the Making Words strategy with guided reading instruction. It was found that Making Words, when implemented in a meaningful, relevant way during guided reading, does improve students' abilities to segment sounds, and therefore should improve their ability to decode unknown words. Small group direct instruction is crucial when teaching children with and without disabilities how to read, especially at the emergent level in first grade.

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