

ABSTRACT

KINDERGARTEN SIGHT WORD ACQUISITION

This action research project examined sight word acquisition of kindergarten students. Pre-tests were administered to all students in a one-on-one setting by the teacher. An intervention was implemented based on the results of the pre-tests. Following the implementation of the intervention program, the students were given a post-test. Results indicated that the intervention was successful with gains in each child's fluency score. A teacher survey was also administered to determine how other kindergarten teachers are teaching sight word fluency. Survey results revealed that teachers reported using writing lessons, word wall activities, music, hands-on activities, poetry and art to teach sight word fluency. Results indicated that writing activities were used the most frequently. An action plan was included in which Heidi Songs is recommended as a teacher resource for teaching sight word fluency to kindergarten students.

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KINDERGARTEN SIGHT WORD ACQUISITION

by

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

As of July 31, 2006, 7 of the 20 students who began kindergarten in my class were still four-years-old. 9 of them were girls and 11 were boys. 7 of my students spoke English as a second language and 9 of them attended preschool. In September, 2006, data based on a one-on-one assessment of the reading fluency of 13 district kindergarten sight words revealed that only 4 of the 20 students in my class had mastered this state benchmark by the first progress report using the school adopted reading curriculum. What other teaching strategies can I use to help these at-risk students master the reading fluency of the district kindergarten sight words?

What literature is relevant to my question? How do early intervention programs, early literacy, children with disabilities and family perspectives affect approaches to learning to fluently read these words in and out of context? Does age or preschool attendance affect how students learn to read high frequency words fluently? What resources are other teachers in my school district using to teach sight words? Are they seeing positive student outcomes? What tools can I

use to supplement the district curriculum to increase mastery of high frequency words for all of my students? How can I be sure to provide all of my students with a fair opportunity to learn to use these words to their advantage? How can my research be meaningful to other educators?

School Context

As a kindergarten teacher it is my responsibility to provide direct explicit reading instruction to each of my students. The state of California has developed standards and benchmarks from which I create lesson plans using the curriculum resources my school district provides. The activities that my students engage in provide opportunities for learners to explore, understand, and master the state standards and benchmarks. Ongoing assessment of these standards and benchmarks provides me with feedback regarding student understanding which guides my instruction.

After examining assessment data prior to the release of the first progress report in September, it became apparent to me that many of my students were struggling with recognition of the 13 district kindergarten sight words. The school adopted reading curriculum includes lessons with objectives to increase student awareness of these words, yet the student data showed limited results.

I began to look for trends in the ability to read these words and also use them in writing tasks which displays mastery of the overall standard. Reviewing

literature related to age and preschool attendance revealed several trends which validated my concern about my own class and guided my decision to focus on this area for further research and development of an action plan to provide opportunities for positive student outcomes.

The school district for which I am employed has 5 elementary schools. The school that I teach at has Title I eligibility based on having a high percentage of economically disadvantaged students. The Title I eligibility provides additional funding to provide instructional tools for teachers to use when providing instruction to our at-risk student population.

The Success For All reading curriculum has been adopted by our school using these Title I funds. The SFA program is a school-wide reading instruction program which provides ability leveled reading instruction for the entire school with a 90 minute daily block. The kindergarten portion of the SFA program provides cross-curricular instruction from which teachers plan lessons and activities for a half day kindergarten program.

The SFA program is based on the principals of multicultural education and meeting the needs of all learners. The kindergarten program titled “Kinder Roots” is a scripted progressive curriculum which includes aspects of the physical, cognitive, emotional/personal, creative, interpersonal, science, mathematical, language/literacy and social studies domains of learning. There are 13 themed units which build upon each other and correlate with seasons and the school

calendar. The units begin with language arts lessons on concepts of print, phonemic awareness, reading comprehension, letter formation and penmanship strategies. The lessons include whole group activities which use varied teaching techniques. The use of partners and teams to promote cooperation and language development are encouraged throughout the curriculum. There is also a video component which enhances the whole group lessons and provides further background information for increased reading comprehension and emphasizes decoding strategies.

As I examined the assessment data in September it became evident that the SFA curriculum was not providing my students with enough high frequency word practice. I began my research of Dolch Sight Words and methodologies to promote student mastery. I also reviewed research regarding the age of students entering kindergarten and how age affects student outcomes in the area of reading. This led me to further investigate the literature regarding preschool attendance and at-risk students to see if there was a correlation with acquiring sight word fluency. With this information in mind, I began my search for intervention tools to increase student learning of these words for all of my students. I would use this tool to provide an intervention which would be measured for results referred to in chapters 3 and 4.

By studying research about young readers, high frequency word fluency acquisition and teaching strategies, I hope to increase the percentage of my

students who pass this benchmark at the end of the third trimester in June. I also hope to create confident, strategic readers. This information can provide other teachers with valuable information about a teaching strategy to use which may increase student learning of high frequency words in their diverse classes too. This project is significant to my teaching and professional growth and the teaching and professional growth of other kindergarten and primary school teachers.

According to Mills (2007, p. 7), "...educational research should be socially responsive as well as:

1. Democratic-Enabling participation of people.
2. Participatory-Building a community of learners.
3. Empowering-Providing freedom from oppressive, debilitating conditions.
4. Life-enhancing-Enabling the expression of people's full human potential."

By examining the literature published regarding reading fluency and at-risk learners, and applying a new teaching strategy or intervention, I hope to provide all of my kindergarten students with equal access to the reading curriculum. I also aim to improve student learning through the use of multicultural, social justice ideologies. I hope to create a love for reading and life-long learners who will encourage and guide themselves and others to always work to their highest potential.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

With academic school years beginning earlier than the traditional Labor Day start nation wide, more and more kindergartners are beginning school at the age of four. Four and five-year-olds differ in their ability levels based on their developmental readiness for school, with many unprepared four-year-olds struggling through the academic rigor that kindergarten curriculum provides. Teachers struggle to implement required curriculum when students are not ready to attempt it. Alternate teaching strategies are being tried in classrooms to meet the needs of these young students. Due to this issue, many researchers in the education field have explored the benefits of intervention programs and alternative teaching strategies designed specifically for these younger learners. Research in this area has followed several paths.

Research by Lopez and Tashakkori (2004), Baty (1957), Irvine (2003), and Karoly, Kilburn and Cannon (2005B) explored early intervention programs. Their work demonstrated the benefits for young children in attending intervention

programs based on the need to provide overall kindergarten readiness. Research by Aubin (1971) and Lopez and Tashakkori (2006) indicated a need for further research to determine the links between student achievement in later grades and early literacy program attendance prior to kindergarten.

Work relating to programming and meeting a variety of needs uncovered much research regarding young children with disabilities and the challenges of meeting their needs in the academic setting. Work by Reddy and Richardson (2006) and Carr and Blakeley-Smith (2006) described the urgent need for program development and implementation for young students with emotional disturbance and developmental disabilities.

Educators of young children are well aware that family plays a huge role in student outcomes. Parents are faced to make decisions for their children based on the findings of educators and the unique needs of their children. A close look at research into early programming led to the discovery of work done to explore how families approach this need for their young children to become prepared for kindergarten. Researchers Thomas (1969), Lenmark (1966), Fantuzzo, Perry and Childs (2006), and Datar (2003) revealed the family perspective on this issue. Nutrition, parent satisfaction, and child care needs are topics explored based on the needs of the family as a unit, instead of focusing solely on the needs of the young child.

Based on the relationships found among the research relating to kindergarten readiness for younger learners, the relevance of issues facing very young kindergarteners became apparent. Teachers have young kindergartners attempting state standards that are not ready to do so. Creative programming and curriculum may be the vehicle with which to reach these young learners within the kindergarten environment. The findings presented in this review of the literature are organized into the following categories: review of research regarding Dolch Words, early intervention programs, early literacy, children with disabilities, and family perspectives.

Dolch Sight Words

In 1936, E.W. Dolch surveyed children's books. He prepared a list of 220 service words (pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, and verbs) and 95 nouns which occurred again and again in children's books. He then divided this list into grade level lists which would serve as a sequence for teaching Dolch words. The lists did not represent levels of difficulty however they indicate the frequency with which these words are found in written material. These Dolch sight words generally make up from 50 to 75 percent of the reading material encountered by students. Many of the Dolch sight words do not sound out like their spellings might suggest, so sounding them out would be unproductive.

Regarding Dolch sight words, Lee (1999) states “For instructional purposes these (words) are usually referred to as sight words or sight vocabulary because we would like our students to recognize them in less than a second. This enhances their chance of getting to the end of a sentence in time to remember how it began” (1999, p. 2).

According to research by Wolf and Katzir-Cohen (2001), reading fluency refers to “a level of accuracy and rate where decoding is relatively effortless; where oral reading is smooth and accurate with correct prosody; and where attention can be allocated to comprehension” (2001, p. 219). Their work indicates that difficulty with reading fluency is one of the major problems in children with reading deficits. They note that for these students “reading is slow, hesitant, and sometimes extremely laborious. Deficits in reading fluency can only be remediated with high intensity and perseverance” (2001, p. 221).

Based on these findings it can be perceived that Dolch words are an important piece of the reading puzzle. Recognizing Dolch words can help students avoid the frustration of trying to do the impossible. Lee (1999) wrote of Dolch words that “If students know these words, they will know many of the words in whatever they are trying to read. These small successes help build confidence in reading. These words are often the guideposts for comprehension of the entire sentences. Knowing these words is like learning to crawl before

learning to walk” (1999, p. 5). She also notes that “these words include the forms of the irregular verb “be”. In English as in many other languages “be” is irregular. Dolch words can build confidence for ESL students as many of them are basic conversational words” (1999, p. 6). What other factors face beginning readers?

Early Intervention Programs

Upon investigation into the age at which children begin kindergarten, a large amount of research surfaced regarding early intervention programs. Morrison (1995), performed detailed research on early childhood education and described the benefits of Head Start and other early intervention programs across the country. Morrison argues that multicultural education alongside developmentally appropriate intervention programs provide equitable opportunities for all students upon entering kindergarten.

Karoly, Kilburn, and Cannon (2005) studied issues relating to early interventions for children with numerous risk factors, which included the child’s cognitive functioning in behavioral, social and self-regulatory capacities and included physical health. Their study focused on programs that provided child development services from the prenatal period until kindergarten entry and that had scientifically sound evaluations. Each of the 20 programs had its own approach to intervention. Three overall approaches were identified and studied:

1) home visiting and parent education, 2) home visiting or parent education combined with early intervention and 3) early childhood education only. Based on their research, these authors concluded that “interventions having highly trained staff and smaller child-to-teacher ratios appear to offer more favorable student outcomes” (2005A, p. 2). Further, they concluded, “These proven results signal the future promise of investing early in the lives of disadvantaged children” (2005A, p. 3).

In another study, the same authors researched the consequences that risk factors play in school readiness and beyond. The risk factors considered were in contrast to those in the previous study. The risk factors in the previous study looked closely at the child and his or her own developmental stages. The risk factors in this study focused on the child as a whole within a unit of family and community and included living in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty, lack of positive role models, lack of regular access to health care, and the absence of early home literacy-building activities. The authors state that “Thirty-one percent of this kindergarten cohort had one of these four risk factors; another 16 percent faced two or more of them” (2005B, p. 5). The article defined school readiness as a “multifaceted concept that goes beyond academic and cognitive skills to include physical, social, and emotional development as well as approaches to learning” (2005B, p.2). This research indicates not only a need for high-quality early

intervention programs for younger students and their peers, but also a need for future research involving risk factors which actually affect student learning.

More research needs to be completed to determine if the enormous need for high quality early intervention programs is being addressed nationwide. States need to provide a rich environment from which children will springboard into kindergarten having the tools needed to be successful especially if their birthday falls later than their peers. Early literacy programs can provide such tools.

Early Literacy

Studies referenced regarding early literacy development yielded surprising results. Three studies on this topic revealed that children did not consistently benefit from early literacy programs versus children who did not participate in such programs. In a study of assessments used to measure reading success at the end of first grade, Aubin (1971) declares that some measures are proven to be unreliable. Based on her research, she claimed that “There was no significant correlation between expected achievement and actual achievement as measured by the assessments” (1971, p. 44). The objective of the assessments she refers to was to determine a base score as entering kindergartners and then the same assessment was given again at the end of first grade. This study revealed that many of the assessments used were not reliable measures of reading success at the end of first grade.

“Further studies to develop materials which are more effective in measuring student achievement need to be completed” (1971, p.72.). Although a rather dated thesis, Aubin’s work indicates that careful research needs to be done in order to improve the assessments used by educators when measuring growth in early literacy and its benefits for young learners. If the assessments used do not measure the variables teachers need to improve programming, they become irrelevant.

Researchers Lopez and Tashakkori (2004 & 2006) published recent conflicting articles regarding literacy growth of students enrolled in bilingual early literacy programs. In one study, the effects of an Extended Foreign Language (EFL) program on students with lower proficiency in comparison to students who had a higher initial English competence were examined. This study indicated that at the end of first grade there *were no* statistically significant differences between the two groups of students in their performance on the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) or a combination of six other indicators of English literacy development. In their second study, these researchers looked at the short-term effects of a two-way bilingual program on the literacy development of kindergarten and first grade students. This study determined the effects of an Extended Foreign Language (EFL) program versus a 100% English instructional day on children with Limited English Proficiency (LEP). The authors identify

results after one year of program participation which determined that there *were* statistically significant differences between the two groups in two areas of language development; sight word vocabulary and alphabetic knowledge. The authors conclude that this study revealed that students in the EFL program did make adequate academic progress, which confirms the usefulness of the two-way bilingual early literacy program. Their results in the second study showed a reduction in the achievement gap between LEP students and others. “Bilingual programs do not always boost achievement in this at-risk population of students” (2004, p.6). This conclusion indicates the need for further research regarding bilingual programs and early literacy of at-risk younger learners. How can teachers guide instruction for these young students once enrolled in kindergarten? If young children with language barriers are struggling in kindergarten, how are other young student populations faring?

Children with Disabilities

Researchers have collected data and studied the effects of intervention programs for young students with and without identified disabilities. A report published by Compton, Fuchs, Fuchs, and Bryant, was published in 2006, which argued that by using very specific measures researchers could evaluate current models of identifying learning disabilities among kindergarten and first grade students. This

two-year longitudinal study involved researchers using specific measures to pose two questions:

- 1) Does adding initial word identification fluency (WIF) and 5 weeks of WIF progress-monitoring data improve reading disability (RD) prediction?
- 2) Can classification tree analysis improve the RD prediction accuracy compared to logistic regression?

Their study resulted in 14 pages of quantitative data which indicated that “...reading disability prediction improved sufficiently to recommend their use with response to intervention” (2006, p.26). This research indicates that a greater student outcome could be obtained if pre-screening were done prior to the entry of kindergarten and/or first grade.

Similar results were obtained in another longitudinal study performed in Delaware and detailed the outcomes for children enrolled in two types of programs: programs serving children with identified disabilities and programs serving children living in poverty. Using a large sample (717 students) and a post-test only design, these researchers found that students who received program services through state funded agencies “...showed significantly better academic outcomes than students who did not receive these services” (Gamel-McCormick & Amsden, 2002, p. 12). Results indicated that poverty stricken children who participated in Head Start programs performed better four years after receiving the

services than children who did not participate, as well as identified special education students identified prior to entering kindergarten or first grade.

In a closely related article from 2006 researchers Reddy and Richardson explored three school-based prevention and intervention programs for children at-risk for and identified with Emotional Disturbance (ED). They reviewed more than 26 published school-outcome studies, along with follow up data to accompany their original research. The authors affirm that the need for a closer look at the program options for these students is crucial. They also made note that the need for further program options for this student population was so crucial that the U.S. Surgeon General Report in 2000 and the President's Freedom Commission on Mental Health in 2003 both recommended the transformation of the mental health system to promote early identification and intervention services for children at-risk for and within school and public health care settings. They also argue that past attempts to educate this student population has been unsuccessful and the need becomes greater to educate this population as increasing amounts of students fit into this eligibility criteria. This means they are in classrooms with older peers and being held to the same state standards.

After reviewing the literature cited regarding children with disabilities, it is evident that again, further research must be done. In order to determine what next steps may take place to ensure success for young kindergartners, research based on

what works well for these students is necessary. How do families feel about how their young children's needs are being met?

Family Perspectives

The age at which students begin to attend kindergarten is often controversial. An article written by Datar in 2003 outlined the dilemma facing parents and educators regarding the age at which students begin school. Datar researched student performance on standardized testing based on the age at which they began to attend school. She concluded that students who entered school at age six instead of age five "...performed significantly better on standardized tests and benefit from having more schooling" (2003, p.19). In contrast, she also noted that beginning school later puts a financial burden on low-income families, having to pay for day care for an additional year. Datar urged that policy makers should consider both cognitive and non-cognitive consequences when viewing entrance age policies. Many factors are involved for each child. This work indicated that family members and caretakers should be involved in making these decisions alongside schools.

Another family perspective issue comes into play when reviewing child nutrition. A dated work by researcher Ruth Thomas (1969) investigated the concern regarding a possible link between the nutritional status of kindergarten students in migrant, Mexican-American families in Visalia, California and low

school performance. Two questionnaires were developed to interview parents and teachers regarding each child's performance and dietary intake. In order to provide further data, laboratory tests such as urinalyses and blood tests were administered to the students. Dental evaluations were also conducted. Having data to develop a base line now, Thomas then provided meal choices for students at school. Further lab tests were conducted to determine the results of this food intake on the nutritional status at this time. Her results showed that students were provided up to 50% or more of their minimum daily food requirements in their school meals and snacks. The enrichment of the foods provided at school contributed directly to this minimum daily food requirement. The intake of nutritious foods is a compelling factor in readiness to learn and promote positive student outcomes for kindergarten and school children of all ages. This study emphasized that children who are malnourished due to low socioeconomic status need enriched supplements at school in order to be more successful in the classroom.

More research related to family perspectives was done by researchers Fantuzzo, Perry and Childs in 2006. These researchers developed and distributed a survey to 648 parents of preschool, kindergarten and first grade children in a large urban school district. A Parent Satisfaction with Educational Experiences (PSEE) scale was then developed and the data yielded three dimensions of parent

satisfaction: teacher contact experiences, classroom contact experiences, and school contact experiences. Multivariate analyses revealed that parents with children attending Head Start or kindergarten, were more satisfied overall than parents of children attending first grade. Married parents divulged a greater amount of satisfaction with their teacher contact than did single parents. The authors also indicated that their study revealed the need for teachers to reach out to parents who are employed on a full-time basis and to those who are divorced. “Communication with both parents in a divorced situation was the lowest scoring on the PSEE scale and indicated that taking extra time to contact both parents would be worth while on the part of the teacher” (2006, p.11).

Conclusion

The literature reviewed suggests there is a need for teachers to teach high frequency words to young readers and for programs to provide a foundation for children prior to their kindergarten experience, throughout it and beyond it. First, young students attending early intervention programs have proven results later in their education according to Morrison (1995) and Irvine (2003). Second, students involved in early literacy programs can show short-term and long-term benefits based on the work by Aubin (1971) and Lopez and Tashakkori (2004 & 2006). Their language and cognitive abilities should be looked at closely here. Reddy

and Richardson (2006), Carr and Blakeley-Smith (2006), Compton et al. (2006) and Gamel-McCormick and Amsden (2002) provide evidence that children with disabilities if identified early on, can benefit greatly from special programs prior to kindergarten attendance, lessening their risk-factors as young students in a class with older peers. And lastly, the family's perspective plays an important role in the education of young children based on the research by Thomas (1969), Fantuzzo et al. (2006) and Datar (2003).

The literature reviewed is not conclusive as to whether or not children should begin attending kindergarten at age four, five or six years old. However, it does indicate that there are many more factors besides the physical age of the child in determining his or her potential educational outcomes. States should gather more information and should involve families in this decision. Each child has his or her own unique needs and it should be a group decision based on the best interests of each child as to when they are "ready" to begin school which would mean determining when they are "ready" to begin reading.

Action research guided by this literature review could result in positive student outcomes for all kindergarten students. Teaching students to recognize high frequency words provides them with a valuable fluency tool. There is no magic age at which students are ready for school and currently teachers and parents have little choice in this matter. If young students struggle to master the

state standards, how can teachers meet their needs? What activities and strategies can teachers provide these young students to ensure their success in their first year of school? When a teacher receives a young student (still four-years-old) they need to gather information from that child's family, preschool and/or any other educational or day care experiences. Providing intervention programs as needed as well as pursuing special education avenues if appropriate are the responsibility of the teacher and family of this young student, in addition to exploring teaching strategies to guide student learning at school and at home. Determining if each child is truly ready for the academic rigor of the first grade curriculum should be looked at very closely and decisions should be made based on extensive information and data gathered from all parties involved and after interventions have been attempted. Taking into consideration the needs of the family and the child would benefit young students on an individual basis and promote collaboration. Also being sure to take into consideration the concepts and theories of child development and developmentally appropriate activities and experiences should become more of a focus in daily teaching and could promote further interest for action research projects involving reading fluency and kindergarten students.

Chapter 3

ACTION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

Pre-Test Data Results

Based on the research introduced in the previous chapter and the need for my class to improve their sight word fluency, I chose to assess their current abilities. Each child was given a one-on-one sight word fluency assessment. I indicated on their assessment form which words children read accurately and which words were misread. This assessment served as the pre-test and included the following words: and, like, you, the, see, will, to, can, go, I my, is, have. The pre-test indicated that on the date it was given, 4 out of 18 students (22%) were able to read 13 out of 13 district sight words. This leaves room for 14 students to show growth after the intervention is applied.

TABLE 3-1
Sight Word Fluency Assessment
correct by student initials (13 total)

CG	CZ	CS	NA	FG	PP	NE	MG	NM	MD	HC	AO	JS	NR	AS	JW	JO	LO
13	13	13	13	12	7	7	6	5	5	4	4	3	3	2	2	1	0

I also administered a writing test of sight words to determine pre-intervention data. This written student assessment revealed that only one of 18 students (.05%) could accurately use the district sight words in their own writing. Applying this reading standard to writing activities displays mastery of the overall benchmark. Based on this pre-test data, we have a lot of room for improvement.

TABLE 3-2
Sight Word Writing Assessment
correct by student initials (10)

CG	CZ	CS	NA	FG	PP	NE	MG	NM	MD	HC	AO	JS	NR	AS	JW	JO	LO
10	6	6	5	5	4	4	3	3	3	3	2	2	1	1	0	0	0

Intervention Application

The Oakley Union School District held a staff development day district wide in which teachers had break out sessions to discuss reading strategies within our grade levels. During this discussion, many teachers pointed out that the use of a new supplemental teaching technique, Heidi Songs, was showing results with their kindergarten students. Their ability to read sight words fluently was increasing. I began to research Heidi Songs.

I found the following citation on her website:

“Learning can be fun! Using the proven new Heidi Songs method, even preschool age children can easily learn to identify numbers, shapes, and spell words just by listening to music! This program was developed by Heidi Butkus, a credentialed Reading Specialist with more than 18 years of primary classroom experience. These simple songs have been classroom tested and revised over a period of several years. They are perfect for children from preschool to second grade, and have been proven successful in teaching concepts even to special needs children, "at-risk" students, and second language learners. They are also very engaging for faster learners. Each song has down-loadable hand motions for active classroom learning”(www.heidisongs.com).

The Heidi Songs sight word practice DVD was shown to the class 3 times per week for 4 weeks in 10 minute intervals. Students participated in movement activities accompanied by music to provide practice of reading and writing sight words. Informal observation during the instruction sessions indicated that my students were enjoying participating in Heidi Songs and students asked to do more when our sessions were over. Students indicated that they were beginning to feel successful.

Post-Test Data

After the intervention had been administered, it was time to reassess student learning. I administered the same one-on-one sight word assessment that was given as the pre-test. Student scores improved dramatically. Previous data showed that 14 students were unable to master this standard prior to the intervention. Post-test data indicated that 12 students out of 18 (66%) were now able to read the 13 district sight words fluently. Six students were still unsuccessful but attempted the assessment. This showed a growth of 44% on fluency overall.

A post writing test was also given to measure student growth following the application of the intervention. This written test data revealed that 11 of the 18 students (61%) given the assessment were successful with using the sight words in their writing. This was an improvement of 60% from the pre-test.

Teacher Surveys

It was important to me to find out how teachers were using reading resources and teaching strategies across our school district to teach sight word fluency. I developed and distributed a Likert Scale survey to kindergarten teachers from

different schools in the Oakley Union School District with the following questions

in mind:

What resources are teachers using to teach sight words?

How many students began kindergarten at four-years-old?

Are English Learners struggling across the district to learn sight words?

Does student writing improve when sight word fluency is mastered?

Below are the quantitative results of the first question based on teacher surveys:

Wordwall

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Yes	11	73.3	91.7	91.7
Valid No	1	6.7	8.3	100.0
Valid Total	12	80.0	100.0	
Missing System	3	20.0		
Total	15	100.0		

FIGURE 3-1

HandsOn

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Yes	9	60.0	75.0	75.0
Valid No	3	20.0	25.0	100.0
Valid Total	12	80.0	100.0	
Missing System	3	20.0		
Total	15	100.0		

FIGURE 3-2

Music

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Yes	11	73.3	91.7	91.7
Valid No	1	6.7	8.3	100.0
Valid Total	12	80.0	100.0	
Missing System	3	20.0		
Total	15	100.0		

FIGURE 3-3

Poetry

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	3	20.0	25.0	25.0
	No	9	60.0	75.0	100.0
	Total	12	80.0	100.0	
Missing	System	3	20.0		
Total		15	100.0		

FIGURE 3-4

Writing

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	12	80.0	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	3	20.0		
Total		15	100.0		

FIGURE 3-5

Art

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	1	6.7	8.3	8.3
	No	11	73.3	91.7	100.0
	Total	12	80.0	100.0	
Missing	System	3	20.0		
Total		15	100.0		

FIGURE 3-6

Based on this data, 100% of teachers indicated that they use writing activities to increase sight word fluency. 91.7% of teachers reported that they use word wall strategies and music to increase sight word fluency. Hands-on activities are used by 75% of the teachers surveyed. Heidi Songs are used by 58% of the teachers in my school district. Poetry and art are the least used teaching strategies as reported by this survey group.

The next question I sought answers to was how many students do you have that were four-years-old when they began in your class. Results revealed that two classes began with 5 young kinders, 2 classes began with 8 young kinders and 2 classes began with 10 young kinders.

		FourYearOlds			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No Response	2	13.3	16.7	16.7
	Three	1	6.7	8.3	25.0
	Four	1	6.7	8.3	33.3
	Five	2	13.3	16.7	50.0
	Eight	2	13.3	16.7	66.7
	Nine	1	6.7	8.3	75.0
	Ten	2	13.3	16.7	91.7
	Eleven	1	6.7	8.3	100.0
	Total	12	80.0	100.0	
	Missing	System	3	20.0	
Total		15	100.0		

FIGURE 3-7

The third question I had answered by the teacher survey was if teachers agree or disagree that English Learners struggle to be fluent sight word readers. 53.8% of teachers surveyed reported that they agree with this statement while 41.7 disagree based on the chart below.

		ELLStruggle			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	7	46.7	58.3	58.3
	Disagree	5	33.3	41.7	100.0
	Total	12	80.0	100.0	
Missing	System	3	20.0		
Total		15	100.0		

FIGURE 3-8

The final question answered by this survey was sight word fluency led to writing improvement. 100% of the teachers agreed that reading fluency does affect writing development for kindergarten students. This data led me to

conclude that teachers in my school district are using writing activities to teach sight word fluency which then leads to improved student writing samples.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	12	80.0	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	3	20.0		
Total		15	100.0		

FIGURE 3-9

Chapter 4

CONCLUSIONS AND ACTION PLAN

CONCLUSIONS

My original research question was: What teaching strategies can I use to help at-risk students master the reading fluency of the district kindergarten sight words? Based on the information I received from the current literature, the intervention I applied, and the data I collected and presented in chapter 3, the use of the Heidi Song program will allow for more positive student outcomes when used alongside the district mandated reading curriculum. Writing lessons, word walls activities, music, hands-on activities, poetry and art are also strategies teachers can use to increase sight word fluency and create equal access for all students.

There are many conclusions to be made based on the literature reviewed and the data presented by this project. The state of California has set forth

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academic expectations and kindergarten students who begin school at a young age are already at-risk. Students with one or more risk factors struggle throughout their school experience. Teachers can provide additional guidance for these youngsters by using new teaching strategies which enable them to be more successful in the classroom setting and will lead to mastery of the state standards.

Teaching kindergarten students to recognize sight words leads to reading fluency. Teachers who use strategies which encompass music and movement build confidence among young readers as my results have shown. Teachers need to choose activities for their students to participate in which offer a multitude of opportunities for exploration, practice and mastery. With a solid foundation of early reading strategies, students will become life-long readers who read for meaning and synthesize information easily. Learning to recognize sight words is a step in this endeavor.

Action Plan

Building the confidence of young readers is a personal goal of mine as a kindergarten teacher. Creating a learning environment in which youngsters take risks and practice skills to build a love for reading is another goal. In order to reach these goals, I must provide all learners with opportunities to explore, practice and master the California state standards.

Varying teaching techniques will enable young kindergarten students as well as at-risk students to have the opportunity to become fluent readers.

Mastering sight words prior to the entry of first grade will provide a strong foundation for first grade reading standards. I will continue using Heidi Songs to reinforce my sight word teaching lessons and will explore the other programs her company has created. I will also find other movement programs to enhance the delivery of my lessons and deepen the understanding of my students.

As I research and implement new programs, I will share them with my kindergarten colleagues. Collaboration and reflection will strengthen our teaching techniques and create positive student outcomes. Allowing children to be successful is my ultimate goal. Sharing my knowledge with other teachers will benefit all students at our school and in our school district.

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Additional Resources

U.S. Surgeon General Report.

<http://www.surgeongeneral.gov>

Presidential Freedom Commission on Mental Health.

<http://www.mentalhealthcommission.gov>

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
TEACHER SURVEY

Kindergarten Teacher Survey

Please circle your answers below:

1. Which trimester did you begin to teach sight words this year?

first second third

2. I used Heidi's Songs to teach sight words this school year

yes no

3. I used a word wall to teach sight words this school year

yes no

4. I used hands-on activities to teach sight words this school year

yes no

5. I used music to teach sight words this school year

yes no

6. I used poetry to teach sight words this school year

yes no

7. I assigned homework for sight word practice this school year

yes no

8. I used writing activities to teach sight words this school year

yes no

9. I used small groups to teach sight words this school year

yes no

10. I used whole group lessons to teach sight words this school year

yes no

11. I used art projects to teach sight words this school year

yes no

12. I would like to have more resources to help me teach sight words

yes no

13. The curriculum I use does a good job of including sight word lessons

yes no

14. I had to reinvent the wheel to teach sight words this school year

yes no

15. My colleagues shared ideas for teaching sight words with me this year

yes no

16. Teaching sight words improved my student's reading fluency this year

yes no

17. Teaching sight words improved my student's writing this school year

yes no

18. Parent volunteers helped me teach sight words this school year

yes no

19. An instructional aid helped me teach sight words this school year

yes no

20. An ROP student helped me teach sight words this school year

yes no

21. I assessed sight word fluency often this school year

yes no

22. There are sight words on the walls in my classroom this year

yes no

23. Younger kinders struggle to learn sight words

agree disagree

24. Bilingual kinders struggle to learn sight words

agree disagree

25. How many of your students were 4 years old when they began school in August?
