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# Improving comprehension and vocabulary through small group instruction with second grade students

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Improving Comprehension and Vocabulary through  
Small Group Instruction with Second Grade Students

By:

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Requirements for the Degree of

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### Abstract

Literacy continues to be an area of focus in today's classrooms. Learning to read and reading to learn are a large part of what teachers are teaching in classrooms. Students that struggle with reading need extra support. The following research closely examines the use of small group intervention within the classroom setting to support readers struggling with vocabulary and comprehension skills. The study used formal and informal assessments to measure growth of four second grade students. The assessments were administered pre and post intervention over the course of six weeks. The results are presented as well as the strengths and limitations of the study. The researcher also made recommendations for each student involved in the study.

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## **Chapter One Introduction**

Literacy continues to be an area of focus in schools across the United States. National reading scores are constantly on the decline and teachers are required more to teach more and not given more time to do it. Our students need more individualized learning and their sociocultural needs are growing as well. As teachers we need to take the time to look at each child and their academic needs and do our best to meet those needs throughout the school year. Vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension are two literacy skills necessary for a student to become a successful reader. If these areas are not strong, the student will struggle in all subject areas that require reading and understanding text. The student will also struggle with reading and following directions as well as decoding new vocabulary and applying what they have read and learned to their school work. I have chosen to focus my research on small group instruction to increase vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension with students who have low reading test scores.

### **The School and Programming**

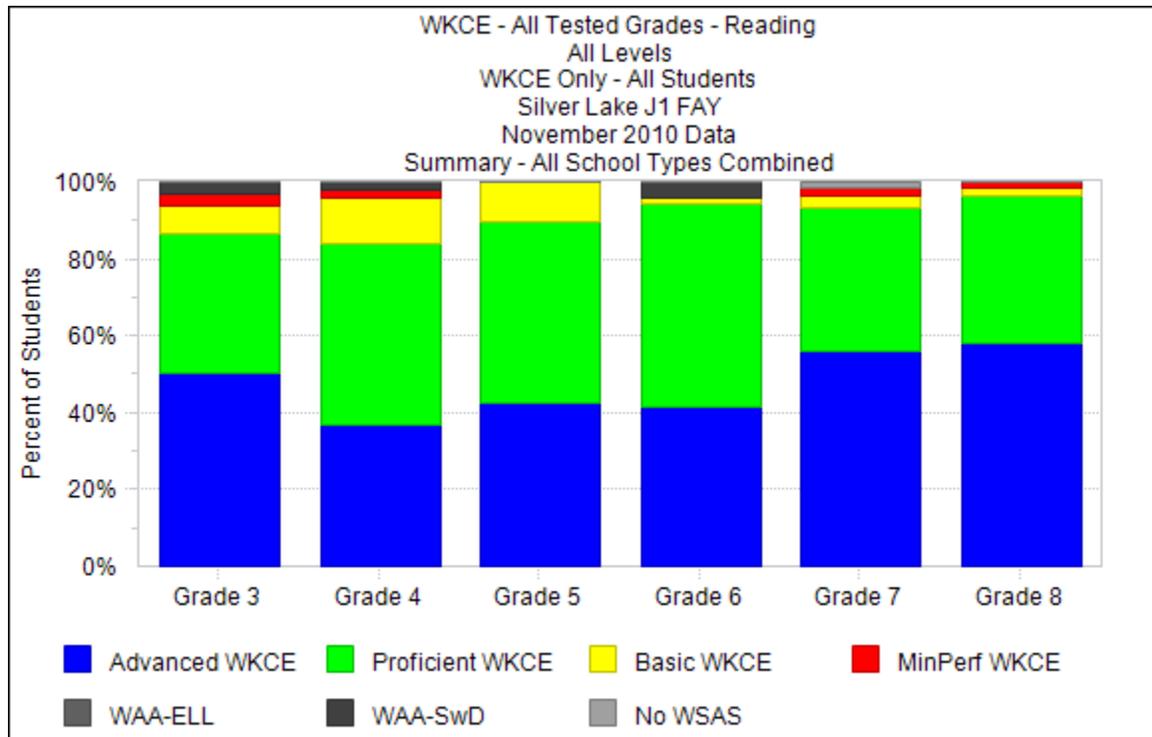
Lakeside Elementary (pseudonym) is a public school in a rural town with a population of approximately 2,300. The school consists of upper middle class families and low income families; there are few families that are in-between. The families that attend Lakeside are predominantly Caucasian with 10 or so Hispanic families and 2 African American families (J. Gendron personal communications, 10-31-10) Lakeside is a K-8 school with a total enrollment of approximately 550 students in the 2010-2011 school year. Forty-one percent of students received free and reduced lunch during that same school year.

The school is considered its own district and is run by a district administrator, school board and principal. The school does not have a curriculum coordinator, however, there are

attempts to align the curriculum with the surrounding public elementary schools (there are 4) because they all feed into the same high school.

Lakeside Elementary uses the *Treasures* reading series by MacGraw/Hill (MacGraw & Hill, 2011). This series includes a basal textbook and corresponding grammar and spelling books. This series aligns to the state standards and incorporates all reading and writing aspects into one curriculum (MacGraw & Hill, 2011). Each year the students of Lakeside Elementary are assessed using the state assessment, *Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam* (WKCE). School wide results indicate between 80-85% of all students reading scores are proficient or advanced (see table 1).

Table 1



Students that need extra support in reading receive services under Title One and Response to Intervention (RTI). The Title One teacher, also the school's reading specialist, services students who are behind in literacy but not behind enough to qualify for the special education program. She works with approximately 60 -70 students from the K-4th grades in the course of a week (C.Sotos, personal communications, 11-01-10).

Students in the Title One Program must qualify for services. They are given the DIBELS Assessment (Good & Kaminiski, 2007); their reading grades and teacher and parent referrals are taken into consideration before they enter the program (C. Sotos, personal communications, 11-01-10). Recently Lakeside Elementary school adopted the Response to Intervention (RTI) process for identifying kids with low literacy skills. This process also uses the same qualifying procedures as Title One.

The RTI process involves 3 tiers of instruction. Tier one is the curriculum provided by the general education teacher in the classroom during a normal language arts block. Tier two and three are currently pull out programs that focus on literacy skills that the students struggle with. Tier two is for students that need extra support in the skills being taught in the classroom. Tier three is for the more severe literacy concerns. These students are below grade level in one or more skills that were taught in the previous year. Lakeside Elementary School has an RTI aide that administers these different interventions. She works with the Title One teacher (reading specialist) creating effective activities and using programs to support the students with literacy needs. These are the only programs that the school has in place to help students with language and literacy concerns.

Other than the reading specialist Lakeside Elementary School has a psychologist who conducts most of the testing for special needs referrals and students in need of RTI. She is the

only person in the school that is certified to administer the ACCESS test (given to determine the level of an English Language Learner). There are numerous aides in the building to assist in the special education classrooms and to administer the DIBELS test (Good & Kaminiski, 2007) for RTI however none of them speak another language well enough to speak to the children who would benefit from it.

Lakeside Elementary has approximately 15-20 students per classroom in 4K-3<sup>rd</sup> grades and approximately 20-25 students in 4-8<sup>th</sup> grades. Lakeside Elementary administrators also require teachers to collaborate with their grade level once a week to make sure that they are working together and sharing ideas. The specials teachers (music, art, gym, and guidance) also attend the weekly meetings if they are available. In an effective ESL program or a literacy program, the teachers and specialists should be collaborating with the general education teachers to develop plans for the students with needs within their classrooms (Yoon, 2008).

### **Best Practices for Acquiring Vocabulary and Strengthening Reading Comprehension**

An effective Literacy Program requires a combination of activities that provide new experiences to build vocabulary, engaging text to encourage comprehension and constant reviewing and discussing to make these skills meaningful for each student. Students should be reading, and discussing what they are reading, every day. Teachers should be using technology, video clips, pictures, objects and real life examples to build background knowledge and vocabulary. Teachers need to be connecting to the children's background knowledge and culture to make learning real and to validate them as contributors to the classroom (Irwin, 2007). The books and material used to teach literacy should be books or topics that are of interest to the

students. If you can reach a child through a topic they are interested in, they are more likely to succeed in learning the concept being taught (Irwin, 2007).

Teachers should encourage dramatic role play and socialization to strengthen students' language (Vukelich, Christie & Enz, 2008). Students need to talk about their experiences and how they relate to what they are reading and learning. When students talk about their experience with a text, they are building upon a knowledge base and allowing that information to become concrete in their minds.

The programs that schools choose to use should be a combination of pullout and inclusion instruction (White & Turner, 2005). Teachers should be using whole group instruction to model and discuss the material being presented and they should hold small group sessions for those students that need more specific instruction. For example: A teacher can read a story to the whole class and conduct sequencing and recall activities. When it is time to focus on something more in depth like, main idea and detail, they should pull small groups so that they can see which students needs more support and which students understand and are ready to move on.

Best practices for teaching literacy are really best practices for all teaching. Teachers should be using multiple tools to teach their students, reviewing the material and allowing the students' time to use what is being taught. No two children learn in exactly the same way, therefore presenting material in numerous forms will allow every child the opportunity to succeed.

### **The Student, Staff, and Parent Population Used for Research**

In order to conduct my action research I will have to work with the students in my classroom, the reading specialist, and the RTI aide. I will need to collaborate regularly with these teachers to gain information and ideas as to how to serve these students. I will meet with them

regularly to make sure that the work I am conducting with my students aligns with the work they are receiving in their intervention groups. The reading specialist will help me to analyze the data collected so that I am making the best choices for my students.

The makeup of my classroom is a total of 16 students, 10 boys and 6 girls. I only have one student that would be considered an ELL (English Language Learner). We do not have an ESL program in our school so he receives services from our reading specialist. All of the other students in my classroom are Caucasian and 5 of them receive free and reduced lunch. I have one student who receives minimal service from our learning disabled teacher (LD). This boy has an Other Health Impairment label (OHI). He also receives services from the Speech and Language Department.

The parents that I work with each year are extremely supportive of the work teachers do. I will be obtaining permission from them to work with their students in small group settings. I will provide them with the information I gather and will also provide them with information as to what my research is and why it will be useful to me.

### **Overview of Action Research**

Building a strong, successful reader takes dedication, a variety of activities and hard work on the part of the student and the teacher. Teachers are supposed to help their students to the best of their ability to learn the material being presented. Teachers need to make sure that every child has an opportunity for success and in my action research I plan to pull a group of children with literacy concerns on a weekly basis to support their reading and literacy skills.

I will begin the research process by looking at the MAP (Measure of Academic Progress) scores of all students in my class. Any child that falls one standard deviation below the average in reading, I will pull for small group instruction. I will look at the breakdown of the MAP test to

see which subcategory the child is struggling with the most. I will use these sub categories to help determine my instruction.

The study will begin with the administration a vocabulary test with 25 words on it. The words were chosen from the stories that I will focus on in the small group. I will administer this assessment to make sure that I have not chosen words the students already know.

I will meet with the students three times per week, for 30 minute sessions. We will front load vocabulary and background information that pertain to the material being covered the following week in my regular reading class. The students will receive 4-6 vocabulary words that are in the story for the following week. I will teach them the vocabulary before they need to use it so that it is familiar to them when it is introduced to the whole class. I will also use video clips, trade books, and real life samples to help them build background knowledge about the material they are learning. I will use the basal textbook and guided reading books at their level so they understand what is being taught. I will model retelling and sequencing strategies to teach these students how to recall information. We will use graphic organizers to organize our information and vocabulary games and flashcards to aid in learning new words. After each week, the students will take an informal assessment. This assessment will focus on the words they were taught and the comprehension skill that was introduced that week. After the 6 weeks of small group instruction, the students will take a post vocabulary assessment and they will also take their MAP test. These results will show me if the small group intervention was successful.

The first session of the week (Mondays) I will introduce the vocabulary. We will define it, use it in sentences and practice with the words using flashcards or memory games. I will also try to incorporate pictures or video clips of the setting we will be reading about on Wednesday. I will engage the students in a discussion about the setting. Our second session of the week will be

on Wednesdays and we will be reading the story of the week aloud. Next we will use the story to work on a comprehension skill such as main idea and detail (20minutes). The last 10 minutes of this session we will review our vocabulary by using flashcards. The last session of the week will be review. We will review our graphic organizer, go over the vocabulary and read a guided reading story together. The students will work with a partner to fill out a graphic organizer about the guided reading story. The graphic organizer will pertain to the comprehension skill that was introduced earlier in the week. The activities I choose each week will vary a little but the skills will remain the same. The students will benefit from the routine and feel comfortable in a small group setting with their peers.

Working with students in a small group setting allows for individualized attention and time to focus on areas of need. It is my hope that working with these students regularly will improve their overall reading scores and support their literacy needs. Strengthening their literacy skills will allow them the opportunity to improve in other subject areas where literacy skills are needed. It is the teacher's job to make sure that all children are comfortable and have an opportunity to succeed in all aspects of school.

## **Chapter Two**

In order to develop successful readers, it is necessary for teachers to utilize the best practices in teaching reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition and literacy skills. Children begin learning literacy skills at a very young age and if these skills aren't supported, there is a chance that they will not begin school with a positive outlook on reading. Students' vocabulary development is integral to their oral language development, which is critical for literacy skill development (Dail & McGee, 2011). The focus needs to start early on developing vocabulary and creating new experiences for children to be exposed to exciting language. When students come to school with little background knowledge, low test scores or a lack of literacy skills, it is the teacher's job to help those students and create the best learning environment for them. Creating an engaging environment will build vocabulary as well as the students' background knowledge. Teachers should implement small group instruction to focus on early literacy skills, songs or read alouds to increase comprehension and to gain rich vocabulary.

### **Early Literacy Skills**

Children begin talking around age the age one and from that moment on they are acquiring literacy skills and developing their vocabulary. In an ideal situation a child learns many vocabulary words through rich experiences before they begin school. They are listening to conversations, looking at books and hearing stories. The early years in a child's life become the foundation for their future reading development. Educators need to support that foundation and expand on it for a child to become a successful, educated student.

Preschoolers' vocabulary development is integral to their oral language development, which is critical for literacy skill development (Dail & McGee, 2011). A child begins developing their vocabulary at the same time they begin to talk. They acquire vocabulary at home before

they begin school and the amount of vocabulary they acquire before school depends upon the family's income and exposure to words (Dail & McGee, 2011). A child that comes from a middle class family knows approximately 3,000 words by age 3 and if the child comes from a low income household it drops to 1,500 words. Students entering kindergarten usually begin with a vocabulary of 5,000 words (Dail & McGee, 2011). Children acquire these words by hearing conversations, engaging in new experiences and also by reading or being read to.

The following quantitative study was conducted to see if the Project CORE would raise a child's literacy skills before they entered kindergarten. The study was conducted over two years and focused on 103 African American children of low income families in a rural, southern town. All of the children qualified for free and reduced lunch. The children were from three different daycare establishments, Head Start, a private pre-school and an elementary school program. The children were divided into a project group and a control group. The children in the project group received instruction from the Project CORE curriculum. The teachers of these programs had varied levels of education however they all had at least 5 years of experience in daycare settings.

The Project CORE program consisted of theme based units with alphabet activities, phonemic awareness lessons, read alouds and picture cards for new vocabulary. The teachers received curriculum guides as to how to use the materials and suggested activities. These themes and activities were taught on a daily basis. The students interacted with the material in games and as whole group read alouds and projects. The kids worked on their flashcards and discussed the stories that were read with the teachers. The control group continued the curriculum and instruction used previous to the study. They would do some academic work but a lot of the time was focused on playing.

The Early Language and Literacy Observation Checklist (Dail & McGee, 2011), was used to measure progress for both the control group and the project group in this study. The students were also assessed at the end of both years using the Expressive One- Word Picture Vocabulary Test (EOWPVT). Throughout the first two years the project group was always outperforming the control group on the check list. The children were usually scoring 40-41, which was an almost perfect score. The control group was scoring 18-21. The project group could identify 22 lower case letters and the control group was identifying less than 10 (Dail & McGee, 2011). The one area that was a cause for concern was on the EOWPVT. The students in both groups were scoring the same and there was little growth or improvement at the end of both years.

The directors and researchers studied their data from the first two years. It was determined that they would focus on vocabulary instruction rather than just introducing new words. The teachers attended a workshop that focused on how to teach vocabulary. The Project CORE team changed some of their curriculum so that there was more focus on learning vocabulary in context and using it within their daycare settings.

The teachers focused on role-play with the vocabulary words and built up background knowledge before new words were introduced. The children were acting out a trip to the grocery store in which they would purchase these new items and talk about their flavors, colors, and textures. The curriculum now consisted of “new” vocabulary that these students were not familiar with. For example: rather than only talking about apples and bananas when doing a fruit theme, they were introducing words like, kiwi and mango. The teachers were providing pictures and samples to help these children acquire new vocabulary. The teachers found that in order to increase their student’s test scores they needed to provide new experiences for the

children because they were not receiving the opportunities at home. The goal of Project CORE was not only to raise literacy skill scores but also to provide the children with a larger knowledge base to pull from when they entered kindergarten.

At the end of the third year, the staff reviewed their scores and found that the project students outscored the control students on the EOWPVT. They found that their new curriculum plan had been effective. The researchers concluded that the Project CORE had been successful at providing literacy academic growth to children of low income situations.

The previous study focused on developing early literacy skills for children before entering kindergarten. Daycare providers are making the attempt to educate their students so that when they enter kindergarten they have the necessary background knowledge to succeed in a school setting. The following study describes how vocabulary is acquired by young students and what teachers can do to support and strengthen vocabulary acquisition.

Vocabulary knowledge plays a critical role in people's lives and future possibilities (Nelson & Stage, 2007). Creating a large vocabulary background begins at a very young age and is often supported when a child begins school. There are two ways that vocabulary is acquired, direct and indirect (Nelson & Stage, 2007). Indirect vocabulary acquisition is learned through conversation and socialization. Just being exposed to new words and situations allows a person to learn. Indirect vocabulary acquisition is also learned by reading. The other method is direct. Direct vocabulary acquisition is taught with intent. Teachers teach new words when they are learning a new topic or introducing a new story. The following study by Ron Nelson and Scott Stage focuses on the development of multiple meaning vocabulary words and how it plays a large role in reading comprehension.

The participants in this study were 283 third and fifth grade students from a small, Midwestern, public school district. Of the students that participated 32% were free and reduced lunch which means they were from a low socioeconomic household. The students were from a combination of 16 classrooms and were randomly assigned to either the experimental group or the non-specific treatment group. The students were pre and post tested using the *Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test* (Nelson & Stage, 2007). This test measures vocabulary and reading comprehension.

The students were all taught by their regular classroom teachers. The method used to teach these students was dependent upon which group they were assigned to. Each teacher was given a list of multiple meaning words. Some of the words had two meanings and others had up to four meanings. The teachers could choose the words they wanted from the list based on which words were most relevant to the students and lessons they were teaching. The third grade students taught only the multiple meaning words that had 2 meanings whereas the fifth grade students were given the words with more than 2 meanings. None of the students were taught above and beyond their “normal” language arts time. The only difference was how the vocabulary was taught. The experimental group was taught using contextually based instruction and the non-experimental group was taught using their standard language arts curriculum.

The teachers who taught the experimental group went through a 2 hour training process. In the first hour the teachers were taught why they were using the activities provided and in the second hour they learned how to conduct the activities and watched as the activities were modeled for them. It was noted that these activities allowed the students to use the word at least 9 times before they were expected to “know” it. The teachers had an opportunity to ask questions before they were expected to teach using these activities.

On day 1 the target words were introduced to the students using words they already knew to help activate prior knowledge. For example: The students were formally taught the 2 definitions of the word “accident”. The students read the definitions, read sentences using the different definitions and then had to create their own sentences using the 2 different definitions.

Day 2 was learning the history of the target word/words. So the students learned where the word originated and what its direct translation meant. They then put the original translation of the word into sentences that would help them understand how the word came to be as it is now.

The next activity was a word meaning map. The students had to match the meaning of the words to their correct definition. For example: When learning the word accident, the student would match “crash” to “run into something unintentionally”. They might have another definition to describe accident that does not mean “run into something unintentionally”. Finally the students read short passages to determine whether or not the correct form of the vocabulary word was being used in context. These vocabulary lessons were taught in this format for 4 months. The non-experiment group learned the same kind of words but using their standard language arts curriculum, nothing was added or altered to their “normal” vocabulary instruction.

Teacher self-evaluations and student work was used to measure the accuracy of the study. These methods were evaluated to see which components of the study were being implemented correctly. The teachers had to fill out the evaluations at week 10 and at the end of the study. They used a 1-4 rating scale to determine how well they were following the activities.

At the end of the 4 month time period the students involved in the study were tested again using the *Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test*. The vocabulary results for the third grade students in the experimental group were positive. The third graders who were low to average on the pre-test

made gains and had a higher score on the posttest. They were approximately one standard deviation higher. The third grade students who were in the non-experimental group showed some increase in test scores but nothing significant. The fifth grade students showed little or no change from the pre-test to the posttest.

The reading comprehension scores of all of the students in the experimental group, both 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade showed moderate to large improvements from the pre-test to the post test. They outperformed the students in the non-experimental group.

The results of this study show that the experimental group showed much larger gains on their test scores than the group that did not receive special instruction. Exposing children to words at least 9 times and allowing them to use the word in context helps to cement the word into the child's knowledge base. This word becomes concrete information rather than a word they heard and used once or twice, memorized, were tested on it and then forgot it.

The process used in this study to teach multiple meaning words has proved itself to be useful. The teachers only had to go through a 2 hour training session before they were able to implement it with their students which proves it to be "quick and easy to learn". This study has shown positive outcomes with a relatively easy to use method that teachers can use to aid in the growth of vocabulary.

After the previously described teaching method begins, educators need to make sure they are continually providing situations for these children to acquire new vocabulary and opportunities for them to practice the skills they are learning. Reading aloud to students and allowing them to discuss the material being read exposes them to new words and provides social interactions to learn from their peers. The following study models how read alouds are used in classrooms to create these learning environments for children.

Exposing children to topics and events that go beyond their everyday life is one way to build language and vocabulary. Children need to expand their vocabulary in order to strengthen their language and reading comprehension skills. Researchers suggest that before we can focus on building stronger comprehension strategies, we need to focus on making sure our students have the language and vocabulary to read and comprehend. The following study investigates the impact of Tier 2 instruction on students with low language and vocabulary skills.

This study was conducted using 18 classrooms from nine, Title 1 schools. All students were screened at the beginning of the study to determine early language and vocabulary risks. In each of the 18 classrooms, 10 of the lowest scoring students were chosen to participate in the study. The students were randomly assigned to two different groups. One group was the intervention group and the other was the comparison group.

Both groups were instructed in an 8 week session of the *Read Aloud Curriculum* (Nelson and Stage, 2007). The intervention group received an additional 20 minute small group instruction, 2 times per week. The small group instruction was designed to boost or enhance the skills already being taught during the regular curriculum and also to develop a deeper understanding of the material. Only non-fiction texts were used in the small group instruction. The focus of the small group was to increase student talk about the text, word knowledge, expressive vocabulary, and content understanding.

The non-fiction texts were about animals. The small group instructor used word cards, picture cards, word maps, reminder cards about specific questions, and scripted lessons. All of the students in the small groups received the exact same material and in the exact same way.

The comprehension data was collected by audio taped sessions and retellings. The students listened to a non-fiction story and then were asked to retell the events to the teacher. The

retell was recorded and scored. Trained officials listened to and scored the students and two officials scored each recording. Vocabulary data was also recorded and scored. The students were given a list of 16 words, half were taught and the other half were untaught. The taught words were chosen from the stories and taught in the small group instruction. The students were asked to read the word and use it in a sentence.

At the end of the 8 week sessions the students' scores were totaled and the results were conclusive. The students that received the small group instruction had a much higher score on their vocabulary and on their expository retellings. This is evidence that the Tier 2 intervention is successful for students in first grade. They were only given two 20 minutes small group sessions per week and their scores were 7% percent higher (Baker & Fien, 2010).

The students that had lower scores in vocabulary and comprehension benefited from just 40 minutes of small group instruction per week. If teachers implemented that in their classrooms, it could result in a rise our test scores and help bring students up to grade level in smaller amounts of time.

Increasing small group instruction allows the child a comfort zone to ask questions and to be surrounded by students with the same capabilities. The teacher is able to focus on the needs of the students in front of them and give individualized attention to the areas of need. Teachers need to help students feel comfortable and teach them how to make connections between what they are learning and their own lives. If a child can connect what they are learning to something they already know they are more likely to make the information concrete in their knowledge base (Marley & Szabo, 2010). The following study examines how teachers can make that information more concrete for the students.

One of the most important things a child learns in school is how to read. Unfortunately the number of children unable to meet the basic reading level is staggeringly low. In 2007 the U.S. Department of Education reported that two thirds of fourth graders were at a basic or below basic reading level (Marley & Szabo, 2010). Comprehension and vocabulary are areas of Reading that many students struggle with. Therefore, many schools are implementing new strategies to improve these skills.

In this study the authors used the Indexical Hypothesis (Marley & Szabo, 2010). This is a theory that states early language comprehension depends primarily on the interaction with the environment the child is in (Marley & Szabo, 2010). Connections between objects are often enhanced when a child may physically manipulate an object and it then becomes part of their concrete representation. This means that the information becomes permanent in the child's brain because they were able to connect the object to the information they learned (Marley & Szabo, 2010). Marley and Szabo conducted their study by using the Indexical Hypothesis with a group of kindergarten and first grade students (Marley & Szabo, 2010). They hypothesized that using this method would increase the amount of information that becomes concrete to a student. They performed a quantitative study that had few limitations. The only limitation was whether or not the study accurately represented the population it was intended to reflect. There may have been sociocultural factors and ethnicity differences. For example, if the amount of African American students in the study were less than the ratio of African American children in the school, the study might not accurately represent how this ethnic group would perform. There were 38 kindergarteners and 38 first graders from a suburban, mid-west, school used in this study. The gender and ethnicity were varied and not primarily one group or another.

The study was conducted using stories about zoo and farm animals. Picture books and manipulatives (small animal figures) of the animals in the stories were also part of the study. The students were randomly split up into groups of 19. One group was the listening manipulation group. These students listened to a story and then had to respond by acting out parts of the story using the manipulatives. The reader would hold up a green sign when the students were supposed to act out a page. For example; the page read, “The pigs rolled in the mud.” The students would then have to manipulate their pigs so they looked like they were rolling in the mud. Another group was the listening with pictures group. These students also listened to the story. When the green sign was shown, they had to look at a picture of the action that was read in the story. The third group had to listen to the story as well. When the green sign was shown to this group, they had to close their eyes and visualize what was happening. The students were told to imagine the action in their heads.

All three groups were given a pretest to make sure that they could understand the material being presented. The authors also wanted to make sure that their attention spans were long enough to listen to the story, and perform the activity. The pretest consisted of the children listening to a story of similar length to the stories in the study. The students then had to recall the events in the story and orally answer questions about it. The teachers were also surveyed about the material in the study. They were asked if they thought the material was age appropriate and whether or not the students would be able to answer the questions. The authors used this information to guide the questions in the study and the amount of time spent with each group.

After the instructional period, the students had to recall the story. They were asked orally to recall what the story was about and the events that took place in chronological order. The students could hold the manipulative or look at the picture that they used during the story. The

tests were scored blindly. The students received half of a point for mentioning the correct animal and location and a full point for recalling it correctly. There were a total of 20 points possible. There was also a “Cued Recall” section of the post assessment. There were 12 points possible for this section. An example of this would be: Where did the rooster fly? If the child responded “away”, no point was received however if they answered “to the top of the barn” the child received one point.

The results showed that the students who manipulated objects scored higher than those that did not. These students scored 62 % correct. They were also more accurate in their recall skills than the other two groups. The students who used the picture to help them recall scored 47%. When the study was broken down further it showed that the first grade students were able to recall more than the kindergarteners. The authors noted this but expected those results based on their maturity and experience in school. The teachers of the students noted that students who do not usually participate and perform well on oral questions were scoring well and participating in the activity. The authors speculated that this was because they were engaged and had something to trigger their memory. The manipulatives were a “fun toy” for the students to use during the story. They thought that they were playing when they were actually improving their comprehension skills by creating concrete representation. This supports the theory of Indexical Hypothesis and shows that the students’ comprehension improved when they were able to manipulate the objects (Marley & Szabo, 2010).

Vocabulary acquisition has been studied many times and there are many theories as to what the best methods are that support a child’s vocabulary knowledge. The previous study examined read alouds and how the story was discussed using the read aloud. The following study

examines vocabulary acquisition through stories as well however focuses on whether or not it is beneficial to introduce the vocabulary before, during or after the story has been read.

It is no secret that children enjoy listening to stories. There are also many studies that have shown that reading to children and discussing what they have read increases their vocabulary. Children typically gain approximately 1,000 – 5,000 new words each year they are in school (Brett, Hurley & Rothlein, 1996). The following study focuses on whether or not it matters if the vocabulary words are introduced before or after the story has been read.

This quantitative study took place in Miami, Florida. The students were 175 fourth grade students from six different classrooms. The students were primarily Caucasian, Asian and Hispanic. The students were not pre-tested therefore their reading levels ranged from primer to a fourth grade level. All of the teachers conducting the lessons had a minimum of 7 years teaching experience.

The students were broken up into 3 groups. Two classrooms were assigned stories to read with a vocabulary lesson prior to the story so that they were familiar with the new words in the story. The next two classrooms were just assigned the story without any previous instruction on the vocabulary words and the last two classes were the control group. They had no specific way of teaching the words and lessons were to be taught using the standard curriculum.

There were two books used in the study, the first was *Bunnicula* by Deborah and James Howe and the second book was *The Reluctant Dragon* by Kenneth Grahame. Neither of the stories had been previously read to the students in their classrooms that year. There were 25 words selected from the two books that were most unfamiliar to the fourth graders. A pilot multiple choice test was given to a group of fourth graders not included in the study to make sure

that the words were appropriate and to determine which words were most familiar to them. Based on the results of that test, 10 words were chosen for each story.

At the beginning of the study each teacher gave their class a pre-test of the 10 words chosen. The four experiment classrooms then read *Bunnicula* over the course of 5 days. The teachers teaching the two classes with the “explanation of the words” would introduce them first and then stop reading every time one of the words was read in the story. The class would discuss the words and review what they meant before continuing their story. They would also discuss what other words could be used in place of the vocabulary word. The next two classrooms only read the story aloud and did not focus on the vocabulary words. The final two classrooms did not read the story but were still post- tested on the vocabulary words. The same process followed with the second story, taking another 5 days.

The results were that the first two experiment classrooms (those that had specific vocabulary instruction) were able to remember and use 6 new vocabulary words, six weeks after the instruction. The following two experiment group could only remember and use an average of 3 new vocabulary words six weeks later. The test results for the last two classes were not discussed in the study.

This study confirms that fourth grade students can acquire new vocabulary using either method however explicitly teaching the words and reviewing them was far more effective than just reading the stories. The students were able to make the words part of their concrete knowledge and did not just learn them for the duration of the story. Students need repetition and material being taught needs to be important for them and relate in some way to their life in order for it to become part of their concrete knowledge (Brett, Hurley & Rothlein, 1996).

Teaching students new vocabulary and literacy skills early in their education help them with reading comprehension. Teachers need to build a child's background knowledge in the areas of phonetics, vocabulary, story recall and many other skills in order for students to become successful readers. After students acquire these literacy skills they can begin to learn how to comprehend what they read and teachers can focus on the best methods to support students in their journey of becoming strong and successful readers.

### **Comprehension**

After acquiring the previously identified basic literacy skills in the early years of life, a child begins to learn how to read. They will apply those literacy skills to books, articles, magazines and academic text. However it doesn't stop there. The child needs to learn how to read to acquire information. They are using their skills to learn content area material. The following studies focus on reading to comprehend and what teachers can do to maximize comprehension.

There are numerous programs "out there" to teach reading comprehension. In the elementary years story books are often used to teach any number of lessons from manners to adding and subtracting. Story books are used because children enjoy listening to stories and they are more likely to comprehend an idea if it is presented in narrative form (Kouri & Telander, 2008). Over time reading programs change as well as the research that supports the programs. In recent years a growing number of reading professionals have advocated teaching literacy skills through music and song as well as storybooks. Researchers feel that if children enjoy music as much, if not more, than they do listening to stories, then we should link comprehension to both songs and stories (Kouri & Telander, 2008).

This purpose of this study was to determine whether or not sung story books would enhance story comprehension as well as narrative retelling. Theresa Kouri and Karen Telander conducted this study. They used thirty kindergarten and first grade students. The researchers used twelve children's books in the study. The guidelines used to choose the books were, easily identified theme, main characters had a goal to achieve, pictures related to text on each page, and books that ranged from 13- 30 pages long. The books were numbered 1-12 and given a level. The level one books were used with the kindergarten and the level two books with the first graders. The books were leveled randomly so that each group wasn't receiving easier or harder books. After the books were chosen they were then put to a familiar tune.

Two songs were chosen as the melodies for the books: *She'll Be Comin' Round The Mountain* and *The More We Get Together*. These songs were chosen because of the beat or 'time' they had, their repetitiveness, and range of pitch. The books were sung to one of the two songs and recorded. The stories were sung slowly and included all of the text.

Each child attended four sessions at their school or at a speech clinic. During the first session the child was given a standardized test to determine their phonological processing abilities and expressive language level. The following three sessions included singing or reading and listening to four different stories. The researcher asked each child if they had read any of the stories prior to the sessions. If they had a different book was chosen. Half of the participants were read to, and the other half listened to the stories being sung. After each story the child was asked to retell the story. If the child couldn't or more information was needed the researcher would prompt the child by asking "Is that all you remember?" or "What else can you tell me?" Each child's retelling was recorded and rated based on Mitchell and Irwin's system for evaluating story retelling (Kouri & Telander, 2008).

The system was based on three different components: text based comprehension, reader response and ability to connect to the real world, and language use and ability to organize their ideas. Each component was worth 32 points for a total of 96 points for the retelling. The children were also asked eight comprehension questions related to the story content. The questions were worth 3 points apiece for a total of 24 points.

The results for the retelling were only significantly different in the language use component. The children who listened to the stories being sung outperformed the students that were read to. The students that listened to the stories being sung used more language and a higher level of language when retelling their stories. The researchers speculate that this is because they are able to recall the vocabulary from the story more easily because the song is “stuck in their head”. The other two components did not show a difference in performance. The children’s responses to the comprehension questions were not significantly different depending upon whether the child was listening to the sung story or being read to. The scores were not higher or lower in either of the groups being tested except for their language usage.

The purpose of this study was to determine whether or not a child’s comprehension and narration of a story would increase if the story was sung to them instead of read. The scores showed that the retelling ability and comprehension skills did not increase if they were listening to a sung story. The only area that appeared to increase was the child’s language use. Therefore teachers may want to further investigate the effects that sung stories have on increasing a child’s vocabulary usage.

Using songs to enhance reading comprehension is only one way that teachers can make learning fun. Students respond to things they like such as songs, stories and games. The

following study focuses on using read aloud stories to build children's comprehension capabilities.

A teacher can scarcely get through his or her day without reading aloud. In the elementary grades reading aloud is necessary for the students to follow directions, understand routine and comprehend academic material. Recent surveys show that 76% of teachers read aloud every day and 100% read aloud at least 3 times per week (Brabham & Brown, 2002). The following study compares the effects of different read aloud styles on student comprehension and vocabulary acquisition.

Edna Brabham and Carol Brown conducted a quantitative study evaluating the results that reading, performance reading, and interactional reading aloud styles have on students' literacy learning. Performance reading allows for discussion before and after the story is read but doesn't encourage any talking throughout the read aloud. Interactional reading happens when the teacher encourages discussion throughout the read aloud. He or she may stop to ask a question, or have the students reflect on what was just read. They simultaneously read and discuss the story. "Just reading" the story is exactly how it sounds; the teacher simply reads the story with no discussion.

In order to conduct the study Brabham and Brown randomly chose 15 groups of 12 children from 12 different first and third grade classrooms. The 24 classrooms were distributed across five schools within the same district. The students were a wide range of ethnicities and from a variety of sociocultural backgrounds. Both grade levels were divided into 5 groups at random and selected for the three different read aloud styles. Of the 360 students 114 missed one or more of the sessions, therefore their results were not included in the study.

The same two informative story books were chosen for all three read aloud styles so that all of the children would be receiving the same information. The chosen titles were *Call Me Ahnighito* by Pam Conrad and *Everglades* by Jean Craighead George. Both books had rich vocabulary, interesting information and concepts that either grade had not previously learned. The authors and illustrators of the books had all won awards for their work as well. Scripts were made for all of the groups so that the pre-service teachers leading the groups would be following the same format and teaching the same concepts.

Prior to beginning these sessions all of the students involved were given a pre-test. The test consisted of 40 multiple choice vocabulary questions (20 from each book) and also 34 multiple choice comprehension questions (17 from each book). These students were also given a posttest containing the same questions written in a different way.

In order to conduct the study, 30 pre-service teachers participated in leading the different read aloud groups. They were all certified in teacher education programs. These teachers read the stories to the students, administered the pre and posttests, and conducted the various read aloud groups. The three different groups used the same script for the testing and the reading; however the scripts changed for the post reading activities.

The “just reading” groups discouraged any and all discussion about the book after it was read. Their directions were to take 20 minutes and the students were to write or draw your response to the book. The “performance” reading groups were read to and then were asked scripted questions for 20 minutes. Some of the questions were about vocabulary and others were required responses from the story. The final group, the “interactional” group, was asked questions about vocabulary and concepts throughout the entire session. This group engaged in story related interactions before reading, during and after reading.

The teachers analyzed the audio tapes from the sessions and the posttest results in order to determine the outcome of the three different read aloud styles. The “just read” group performed the lowest on vocabulary acquisition. The “performance” group gained more vocabulary knowledge than the “interactional” group which produced the highest scores. The study proves that read aloud style is important to vocabulary acquisition and makes a difference in the results of how much the students learn.

Interactional read aloud situations allow for the students to ask questions and make connections to a text while the story is being read. This style builds background knowledge of the material being read so that the students have the opportunity to make those connections in their head. The discussion afterwards allows the students to discuss and learn from each other as well as reflect upon the information. This style presents a stronger learning environment for the students and allows them to use the text in a number of ways.

Teachers do their best to make sure that reading comprehension goes above and beyond reading a text and answering questions. However as a child gets older, the processes used to teach and measure reading comprehension change. The child is focused more on reading academic text and learning how to analyze it for information. The following study shows what students are expected to be able to do with a text as they get older.

Reading comprehension is a complex task that requires many different cognitive processes. Other than word identification the reader has to be able to comprehend the material, which means make sense of the information coming in (Vehovec & Bajanski, 2006). Many studies have shown that readers fail to notice inconsistencies during story comprehension. The reader is unable to explain the story after they have read it (Vehovec & Bajanski, 2006). In further studies it has been noticed that 5<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grade is a crucial time for comprehension

monitoring. These students are focused more on the information in the text and its inconsistencies than the younger students. This happens because the older students are expected to read the text and use it in their work. This study was conducted to explore the differences in comprehension monitoring and the use of reading strategies in 5<sup>th</sup> -8<sup>th</sup> grade students.

The study was conducted in three elementary schools in Croatia using students from 5<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> grade. There were 122 fifth graders, 145 sixth graders, 129 seventh graders and 130 eighth graders. The genders were equally chosen and the students had no criteria to meet other than their age. All of the assessments were given to the students in their classrooms. They were administered on different days in one hour time increments. The students were not timed on their tasks.

Vehovec and Bajanski chose a 750 word narrative appropriate for this age level for the students to read. After they read the passage there were 11 open ended questions that each student had to answer. This assessment was used to measure reading comprehension. A fully correct response on each question was awarded 2 points and a partially correct answer was awarded 1 point. The total possible for this task was 22 points.

Comprehension monitoring was assessed by a comprehension test and a cloze-task. There were 10 items on the test and 4 of them were used to monitor the students' ability to notice semantic and syntax errors within different sentences. The following items measured punctuation, whether or not students could locate the sentence that didn't belong in a passage and the last few asked the students which inferences were correct based on the title of the passage. For each correct answer the students were awarded one or two points for a total of 16 possible points.

The cloze-task the students were given a passage in which 16 words were missing. The students had to fill in the blanks with one single word. If the answer was semantically and syntactically correct they were given two points. If the answer was one and not the other they were awarded 1 point. The total possible for this task was 32 points.

The reading strategies were measured using the SQR (Strategic Reading Questionnaire) (Vehovec & Bajanski, 2006). There were 31 items that included questions about the use of different reading strategies. The questions were broken into three areas, before reading, after reading and inference generating. The students answered the questions on a 1-5 scale; 1 being I never use this strategy and 5 being I always use this strategy.

After all of the assessments had been given their points were totaled and the results are as follows: The grade level made a difference in performance in all of the tasks performed. The 8<sup>th</sup> graders outperformed the 7<sup>th</sup> and so on down to the 5<sup>th</sup> graders. This should be expected simply for the fact that the older the child, the more experience they have had with reading comprehension and different strategies. As for the results between the different tasks, different areas improve based on the age of the student. After students complete 5<sup>th</sup> grade there is a large jump academically. It is evident that 5<sup>th</sup> grade is a transitional year. The students made significant gains in reading comprehension in 6<sup>th</sup> grade and their scores were average in the other areas. In 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade, they proved to do well in the reading strategies area. The comprehension monitoring was the highest in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade which shows that these students are most aware of what they are reading and how to recognize inconsistencies in the text.

The study overall showed that comprehension is focused on and learned more in the upper elementary grades. These students are reading text and using it more often, and therefore, have a higher level of understanding. Vehovec and Bajanski state that if we focus on improving

reading comprehension and monitoring in these grade levels we will have more advanced and accomplished readers in high school.

Students in the upper elementary grades are focused on reading and text and using it to find information. Teachers sometimes forget that vocabulary is still an important part of reading comprehension and needs to be taught within the context of the class. The study below describes how vocabulary is being taught in some upper elementary classrooms and how it is supporting their reading comprehension skills.

Comprehension is the reason that we read and vocabulary plays a large role in comprehension. What most teachers want to know and try to figure out is the best strategy for teaching comprehension and vocabulary. Comprehension is made up of many different skills. Students need to be aware of print, have phonological awareness, they need to be able to decode and they must have some vocabulary knowledge (Gooden, Carreker, Thornhill & Joshi, 2007). Some teachers feel that comprehension doesn't require direct teaching. It is something that students pick up along the way. The following study was conducted to determine if direct instruction of metacognitive, comprehension strategies would increase students understanding of text.

The study was conducted in six, third grade classrooms in two urban elementary schools. The schools were deemed demographically and academically equal by the school district's research department. One school was the intervention school and the other was the comparison school. The study lasted 5 weeks and all 119 students were pre-tested before and post-tested after the intervention. The pre and post tests were used to measure academic skills both before and after the intervention. The test used was the Woodcock Johnson III (Gooden, Carreker, Thornhill & Joshi, 2007). The students were tested on their word attack skills, word identification,

decoding, and spelling. Another test was given to measure their comprehension skills. The 2000 Gray Silent Reading test (Gooden, Carreker, Thornhill & Joshi, 2007) was given for comprehension and the criterion vocabulary test (also part of the Gray Silent Reading test) measured vocabulary skills.

The intervention lasted 5 weeks. The students in both school received 30 minutes of reading comprehension instruction per day for 25 days. All of the passages chosen were expository and were at the average child's readability level. The intervention school received instruction in 5 sections: The introduction, in which the teacher grabbed the students' interest by asking a question. Vocabulary: the teacher would introduce two or three new words and work with them for a few minutes, creating word webs. Reading the story: the students read the story, and while they were reading they were reminded to think out loud about the text. During the first week the teacher read to the students, during the second and third week the students and teacher read chorally, and during the fourth and fifth week the students read silently. Summary, was step number 4, and the teacher prompted the students to orally summarize the story beginning with the main idea. Step 5 was questioning. The teacher asked the students questions and they answered orally.

The comparison school had similar instruction but it was not broken into 5 steps. They received the vocabulary words and had to copy the definitions off the board and write them into sentences. The students did not read the text together and the teacher did not read it to them. They read on their own and were not encouraged to think out loud. When they were finished reading the students answered questions about the text on paper, not orally.

The results of the study were based on the students' test scores. The intervention group improved considerably in vocabulary and comprehension. They had the most increase from their

pre- and post-tests in these two areas. The intervention group improved 40% more than the comparison group in vocabulary, and 20% higher in comprehension. The study shows that the direct instruction of metacognitive strategies improves comprehension and vocabulary significantly.

When students are prompted to think deeper about a word, or topic, it promotes deeper understanding. The students in the intervention group were constantly supported by their teacher. She would make sure they were reading and questioning out loud and making word webs to show multiple meanings in words. She allowed the students to orally answer the questions she asked, in order to promote discussion among the students. These students demonstrated a deeper level of comprehension because of the way the story was taught. This proves that metacognitive strategies improve comprehension if they are taught effectively.

### **ESL Literacy Skills**

Literacy skills, vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension can be very difficult material for some students to learn. There are numerous programs in schools to help these children and support their reading education. A program that helps a specific group of children in all academic areas is English as a Second Language (ESL) Programs. These programs are put into place to help students who come from families where another language other than English is primarily spoken. A child who enters a school where only English is spoken may struggle with literacy simply because they don't understand the language and not because they have a reading deficit. The following studies examine how ESL students are taught in English speaking schools and some of the struggles that they have.

Children begin learning how to read in kindergarten. They continue to learn how to read until about third grade. In third grade there is a shift from "learning to read" to "reading to

learn”. For students who are still learning how to read this becomes very difficult. In the early, primary grades teachers read everything to their students to make sure that they understand and comprehend. For example; directions are read out loud, as well as, test questions, stories and even the daily schedule. Therefore, some reading problems aren't realized until the child is older. English Language Learners many times appear to be “fluent” in English until they are expected to read academic material and comprehend it.

The *Historical Tutoring Program* is a program that provides support to ELLs and other students in Social Studies (Colombo & Fontaine, 2009). This program helps them to read and comprehend the material they need for their citizenship test as well as supports their academic vocabulary and comprehension strategies (Colombo & Fontaine, 2009). A study was conducted by Michaela Colombo and Patricia Fontaine to see if the *Historical Tutoring Program* did in fact support fourth grade students in the following areas, vocabulary, comprehension and overall achievement in Social Studies. The authors collected qualitative research to investigate the outcomes for ELLs using this program.

The tutors were chosen based on criteria for an education certification program at a university. These three tutors were required to complete a “Methods of Teaching American History” course.

The students were chosen by their fourth grade teachers and literacy coordinators. The researchers asked the teachers to choose ELLs that needed support in Social Studies but that also had intermediate or above proficiency levels of English. This means that they are able to communicate in English and hold a conversation. Two ELLs were assigned to each tutor. This requirement was put into place to be sure that the students needed help in Social Studies and not

in the English language. The tutors met with their students in 8, two hour sessions, from September to December.

The tutors used material from three different stories over the three month time period. The stories were chapter books that the Social Studies teachers were using to teach different time periods. The tutors worked with their students on the stories to support what was being taught in the classroom. During the first few sessions the tutors tried to engage their students by asking inference questions. The tutors held up pictures from the story *Remember* and asked “w” questions such as, “What was going on in the story in this picture?” The tutors asked these questions to try and encourage the students to have a dialogue about the story. The tutors prompted the students to recall the story by using sequencing words in their questions. For example; “What happened to Ruby after she left?” These strategies were used to help the students comprehend the information they were reading.

The other sessions included vocabulary introduction and use, journal writing, conversations that encouraged students to make text to self-connections, and conversations that used the academic vocabulary. The students were given vocabulary rings, which are laminated cards with all of the vocabulary words and definitions on them. They are held together with a ring so that the students could access the words they need quickly. This tool was useful for the students in their Social Studies class when they needed to write responses and answer questions. The students were required to journal about the stories that were read and were encouraged to use their new vocabulary in their entries.

The researchers used many different data samples to determine their findings. The sessions were video and audio taped, the journals were collected, the researchers monitored the projects the students were working on and observed the interaction between the tutors and the

students. The researchers took the audio and video recordings and transcribed them. They read the journals and used their notes about the conversations to code the data. The researchers were looking for, the use of academic vocabulary, students making text to self-connections, and inferences.

The findings were positive. The ELLs appeared engaged in the conversations with their tutors. They were using the vocabulary correctly and often. The students were able to connect the stories to their own lives, for example a student participant wrote: “I was irritated like *Ruby* when my brother made me leave his room”. The ELLs were also asking questions, which indicated that they were engaged in the activities. The students seemed motivated and interested in the topics and wrote passionately about the stories. Their journal entries were mostly reflections about the stories but were lengthy and pertained to the material being taught. The Social Studies teachers observed that the ELLs were using their vocabulary rings while reading or writing in class. Finally, the teachers found that the students that were involved in the study were able to participate in the class discussions about the book whereas before they sat silently through class. The researchers observed that the ELLs were talking frequently throughout their sessions as well as in class. There were 35 coded self to text connections and 67% of the conversations between tutor and the students were “tutor talk”. Although the number seems high, after directions are read and explanations are given, that leaves the ELLs with 33% talking. This is a great number for students who may not have previously understood the material.

This study provides evidence that ELLs will participate more in class and have a higher interest in their school work if they are given enough support. These students need to feel confident in what they are learning in order to take an interest in it. This tutoring program

provided extra support, in a small group setting, with peers with similar language barriers. These students can improve their academic skills if they are given enough support.

All students need support when they are learning new information. Teachers need to individualize this support and make sure that every child is receiving the education they need and deserve. ELLs learn differently than students who have grown up using the English language. The following study focuses on what teachers have done to make learning literacy skills more appropriate for ESL students.

In the last 10 years there has been a growing concern about meeting the academic needs of all of our students. “No Child Left Behind (2000)” has forced schools to become accountable for meeting the Adequate Yearly Progress targets for all students (O’Day, 2009). Every student should be making specific gains each year based on their age. As the country grows and changes, so do the populations in schools. There are more ELLs in classrooms now, than ever before. These students are not meeting their yearly goals and this has forced researchers to examine the way the students are being educated (O’Day, 2009).

A study was conducted over a three year time span and compared the literacy instructional practices for reading comprehension between native English speakers and ELLs (O’day, 2009). The study also measured the difference in student achievement in reading between native English speakers and ELLs. The study took place in nine, San Diego City elementary schools. Qualitative and quantitative data was gathered from 133 teachers as well as school administrators and instructional coaches. There are approximately 24,000 ELLs that attended the nine schools that participated in the study. The ELLs were all promised a balanced literacy approach; emphasis on meaning, literacy skills instruction, differentiation, and accountable talk.

The researcher randomly selected two classrooms from each of the nine schools in the district. These classrooms were observed for 90 minutes, three times a year. The instructions was scripted and coded in 5 minute segments. Two codes were used, one for specific literacy activities, and one for student teacher interactions. The literacy activities included higher level questions and discussions, meaning beyond what is stated in the text, phonics instruction, and writing. The teacher and student interactions included coaching, modeling and conversation associated with literacy.

The data collectors, selected by the researcher, were former teachers, literacy coaches and administrators all who had a strong background in literacy. They were all trained in coding before each visit occurred. All had to review and revise their data before going back to collect more. Therefore the reliability of the collection process was 80%-100%.

The data showed that the instructional practices of the teachers that were associated with literacy growth were all very similar. All of the teachers were using higher level questioning such as; “What made you feel that way about the text” instead of “did you like the text”. These types of questions allow for students to think about the topic and insert their own opinions and ideas to the answer. The conversations about the text were focused on ideas rather than retelling or recalling as well. The students were able to elaborate on each other’s ideas and build reflective responses. They were connecting the text to their daily lives. The data collectors were pleased with this outcome because it showed that the students were receiving the same level of instruction regardless of who was teaching them.

The researcher used the *California Standards Test (CST)* compare the native English speakers to the ELLs (O’day, 2009). The literacy components of the test and the students’ end of the year scores were used for the comparison. The researcher found that for the higher level

questioning about text section the native English speakers' scores increased by 2.3 points from the previous year. Their scores in the writing section increased even more at 2.7 points. The native English speakers' scores also increased in the conversation section however only a very little amount. This shows that the balanced literacy approach is effective for the native English speaking students.

The ELLs also scored higher than last year on the *California Standards Test (CST)* (O'day, 2009). Their scores in the higher level questioning about text section went up 1.6 points as did their writing scores. The conversation score increased by 1.0 points. The researcher was able to conclude that overall the balanced literacy approach was effective for both groups of students. However it was not as effective for the ELLs. Those students' scores were significantly lower than the native English speakers'. The researcher had made a few hypotheses as to why this may have happened.

The instructional material in all of the schools was being presented at a higher linguistic level than any of the ELLs were at. This means that they may not have been able to understand what the teacher was saying in the lessons. They did not have the background skills to make the material as meaningful to them as the native English speakers did. The native English speakers were able to take more out of the lesson and apply it to their everyday lives. If the ELLs were unable to take the meaning out of the conversation and apply it, it would then be more difficult for them to apply the skills they had learned to another literacy activity later on.

The study did not take into account sociocultural factors. One example might be the amount of time the ELLs had been in an American school. If they were new arrivals, their literacy skills would have been much lower than ELLs who have had an American education for many years. The level of support the students received at home is also a large factor in their

success in school. If the students were receiving additional support from home then their scores may have been higher.

Though O'day was able to conclude that the balanced literacy approach was working for both groups of students, she was unable to conclude as to why the ELLs were scoring so much lower than the native English speakers.

The previous author was not able to determine why ELLs scores were so much lower than the native English speaking students. However the following study determines whether or not the use of small group instruction would help ELLs become successful in learning early literacy skills.

This comparison study focused on small group instruction using secondary tier interventions with elementary grade students. The purpose of the study was to determine whether or not secondary-tier interventions proved successful in enhancing literacy skills for ELLs and native English speakers. The authors, Kamps, Abbott, Greenwood, and Arreaga-Mayer (2007) used DIBELS Testing and the Woodcock Reading Mastery Test to measure pre and posttest findings as well as to check progress throughout the study. They used small groups of ELLs and native English speaking students and tried Tier Two reading interventions to see if it improved literacy skills. Tier Two reading interventions happen when a student needs more instruction and support than the normal classroom instruction. Their methods were both direct instruction and literacy- based approaches.

The framework used by the authors in this study was a quantitative method. They looked at the scores from the DIBELS assessments and the results of the pre and post- tests of the Woodcock Reading Mastery (Abbott, Arreaga-Mayer, Greenwood, and Kamps, 2007). They

based their conclusions and findings on the scores produced by the students involved in the study.

The students used for this study were chosen from a much larger experimental group in Kansas. For this current study, 318 first and second grade students were selected. There were 154 females and 164 males. The ELL population was 170 students compared to 148 native English speaking students. Of the 170 ELLs, 99 were Spanish speaking and the others were a mix of Somolian, Vietnamese and Sudanese. Two different groups were chosen for the study, students who were at risk of failing reading and those who were not at risk.

There were six schools chosen for this study however one dropped out after one year. The school settings were urban schools with a low socioeconomic status. The students were from culturally diverse backgrounds and 84% of the schools' population had free and reduced lunch. Schools 1-3 were part of the experimental group and schools 4-6 were the comparison group.

In the experimental group, direct instruction curricula were chosen. These included, Reading Mastery, Read Well, and SRA (Abbott, Arreaga-Mayer, Greenwood, and Kamps, 2007). They are all considered direct instruction curricula and included teacher modeling, repeated practices and scripted lessons and activities. The comparison group used a balanced literacy style of teaching. This included, guided reading, pull out instruction and literature based on their individual reading level. In both groups, there was small group instruction in groups consisting of between 3-7 students. In order to collect their data, the authors used DIBELS and the Woodcock Reading Mastery Assessments (Abbott, Arreaga-Mayer, Greenwood, and Kamps, 2007). These tests assessed the students throughout their interventions as well as their pre and posttest findings.

The overall findings of this study were that the ELLs had higher outcomes than the other comparison group. The ELLs in the experimental group with the second tier interventions, using curricula with the direct instruction, in a small group setting, had the most improved literacy skills. Another comparison was done with the ELLs that received the balanced literacy approach over the years' time. They performed lower than the group receiving the direct instruction. However, the ELLs overall performed better than the English only groups in both settings. It should be noted that all of the students in the study made gains in their literacy skills over the course of the study.

The implications of this study are that small group instruction in either direct instruction or a balanced literacy approach help students improve their literacy skills more than whole group instruction. Students benefit from the small group atmosphere. It allows students to be comfortable and more open with their thoughts and questions. Another implication that can be made from this study is that ELLs learn better in a direct instruction program when it is used correctly and in a small group setting. The structure was found to help them to understand and to learn the language and skills more effectively than those of a balanced literacy approach. Following a structured routine in any subject can help struggling students because they learn what to expect next and the rules aren't always changing. Patterns help students learn and build mental representations which allow them to make connections and comprehend what they are learning (Abbott, Arreaga-Mayer, Greenwood, and Kamps, 2007). It is important for teachers to learn and to understand which methods and approaches work best for all students.

The pace of a normal classroom and large class sizes, as well as the teaching approach greatly impact how any student will perform but definitely will have an impact ELL performance.

All of these studies emphasize the importance of balanced approaches to reading and literacy in schools. A strong literacy program, taught by motivated teachers, using a variety of strategies is the focus for this research. It is important for teachers to use a variety of methods to teach vocabulary, literacy skills and comprehension. The teacher needs to look at the individual child and assess their needs. There isn't one way that will work for all students therefore a combination of methods and styles will allow teachers to reach each child and support them in becoming successful readers.

### **Chapter Three**

Vocabulary acquisition and comprehension are two literacy skills needed to succeed in all areas of learning. These two skills provide a foundation for readers as they read and use text to gain knowledge. The research collected in Chapter 2 focuses on using group interventions to improve literacy skills. The researchers were able to prove the success of group interventions. Those research articles were the motivation to create a research study using small group, intense instruction. Students that have difficulty in these two literacy skills would benefit from explicit, small group instruction that would focus on these areas and show them how to acquire vocabulary and read for comprehension. The purpose of this study was to determine whether or not intense, small group instruction can improve these skills with four, second grade students. The intervention was focused on learning and internalizing new vocabulary words, reading to find meaning and using specific comprehension skills to better understand a text. This chapter explains who the subjects were, the procedure used for the intervention and the data collected.

**Sample**

The focus of this study was a second grade classroom made up of 16 students. There were 10 boys and 6 girls and they were all between the ages of 7 and 8. The researcher had one student that was considered an ELL (English Language Learner) and one student that received services from Speech and Language as well as support from the Learning Disabilities teacher (LD). Of the 16 students, there were 5 that received free and reduced lunch. All of the students were Caucasian except for the one ELL, who is Hispanic. All of the names in the research are pseudonyms to protect the students.

The first boy, Joe, was the only ELL participant in the study. His parents were from Mexico and his first experience in an English speaking school was last school year, in first grade. Prior to coming to Lakeside Elementary he attended a bilingual school in Illinois. Joe is an average student and has made some impressive gains in the last year. He read fluently and socialized well with the other students. Joe was extremely shy in class and only spoke if he was called on. Joe's biggest problem with literacy was comprehension and words with multiple meanings. He would read the stories well but would have significant trouble answering questions about what he had read. It is also common for ELL students to struggle with words with multiple meaning due to their limited exposure to English instruction. The researcher was not surprised by Joe's need for extra literacy support and had been working with him all year on his literacy skills.

The second, boy participant was Russ. Russ is a Caucasian student and the only child of his parents. Russ had some behavior concerns but was not labeled with any official problems. He was constantly out of his seat, bouncing around the room, and not getting his work done.

Russ had severe handwriting and spelling concerns. He had not made progress in those areas by January of his second grade year.

The first girl participant was Carol. Carol is a very quiet, sweet girl. Carol had been recommended in first grade to the Special Education Department. She was significantly below average and did not appear to be making any gains. Carol was never evaluated because she was referred to late in the year. Carol was already working with the reading specialist receiving Title One services and was in Tier 3 of the school's Response to Intervention program. Carol struggles with reading fluency and phonetics. She could rarely read a sentence without struggling and getting hung up on sight words.

The final participant was Jennifer. Jennifer always put forth her best effort. She stayed after school frequently to get help on her homework and sometimes just to talk. Jennifer received Title One services in first grade. She was watched closely in second grade because her literacy skills seemed to fluctuate. There were days that her work was exemplary and other days that she could not read a sentence. She was put into the group so that she could receive extra attention as well as to work on her literacy skills.

### **Data**

The purpose of this study was to determine if small group instruction would strengthen students' literacy skills in the areas of vocabulary instruction and reading comprehension. In order to measure the progress of this intervention, the researcher used pre and post assessment data to determine the success of the intervention as well as formal and informal assessment.

The students were tested 3 times a year, October, January and the end of March, using the MAP Assessment (Measure of Academic Progress) (NWEA.org, 2010). The researcher chose the sample population by looking at the students overall scores in Reading from the January

assessment. The MAP score also broke down the students' reading score into sub categories and provides a ranking of Hi, Average or Lo for each category. These rankings are based on the mean or average for a second grader. If the student receives a Lo rank it means that their score was 2 or more standard deviations below the mean. If the student receives a Hi rank, then the student's score was 2 or more standard deviations about the mean.

The students are given multiple choice questions to answer and then based on whether the answer was correct; the next question is either easier or more challenging. The school uses this assessment as its district wide assessment, and the scores are used to help determine academic placement.

As previously mentioned the researcher looked at the students' MAP scores to determine where they had the greatest deficits. The average score for students in second grade for the winter assessment was a score of 190 (NWEA website). The student participants in this study earned these scores; Joe – 172, Russ – 180, Carol – 164 and Jennifer – 185.

The MAP scores are broken down into 4 categories, word meaning, understanding text, analyze text and evaluate and extend text. One of the highest areas of need was *word meaning*, 3 of the 4 students received a “Lo” in that category and Russ received an “Average”. The other area of need was *understands text*, all of the students received a “Lo” in this category except for Jennifer who received an “Average” score. It became clear to the researcher after analyzing the scores, that these students needed support in vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension.

Prior to beginning the research the researcher also used a 25 vocabulary word assessment (appendix A) to gauge how many of the words she was using the students already knew. The words were chosen based on the stories used for the intervention. The researcher also used this assessment at the end of the research to measure progress (appendix B).

In order to collect data about the participants' progress while conducting the study, the researcher used an informal assessment at the end of each week as well as written products the students completed in the sessions. All of the students were assessed using a 7 question test on the story and vocabulary words introduced and taught that week (appendix C-F). Three of the questions focused on the vocabulary words and four questions were comprehension questions.

The researcher also collected qualitative data from each intervention session. The data collected was notes taken by the researcher about the individual participants. The researcher noted how questions were answered, who answered questions, which students participated and connected to the topics most during group discussion, and who was in attendance at each session.

### **Methods and Procedure**

After administering the vocabulary pre assessment to the participants and reviewing the MAP data, the researcher developed a plan for the intended intervention. Students would work with the researcher for 30 minute sessions, three times a week for 4 weeks. The first and final weeks of the study were used for pre and post assessment.

Each week the researcher focused on one story and the instruction and activities each week had the same routine or structure. Vocabulary was introduced on the first day. The students saw the words, heard the words and worked with the words by creating flash cards. This gave the students some knowledge of what the words meant before they read the story. The researcher made sure and discussed the topic of the story with the participants prior to reading it. The researcher supported the topic of the story by showing the students pictures or video clips that helped the students connect the story to their own background. The researcher also led a short group discussion about the topic prior to reading so that the students would have some background knowledge before reading the story. The comprehension skill was taught after the

students had background knowledge and had read the story. The researcher chose this structure for the intervention lessons with the intent of helping the students understand the story and connect it to something in their lives to make it meaningful. The last session was used to review the vocabulary and comprehension skill taught before they were asked to use it in another story with their partner. The following is an outline that shows the routine the researcher used each week to focus on vocabulary acquisition and comprehension.

**Week Outline:**

- introduction and use of vocabulary words; read, define and use in sentences
- build background knowledge about the topic/setting of the story using pictures and video clips
- model story read aloud and sequence events of story, using graphic organizers
- review vocabulary, retell story and write about it, read another short story that includes the same vocabulary and work on the sequencing strategy with a partner

The sequence in which the skills were introduced and taught stayed the same each week, however the vocabulary words taught and the comprehension skill that was focused on changed. The comprehension skills taught throughout the course of the intervention were (in this order); fiction/fantasy, beginning middle end, sequencing, and main idea detail. The researcher collected the graphic organizers used with the comprehension skill at the end of each week so that she could see the progress each student had made.

The material chosen for the sessions were the basil story (McGraw/ Hill, 2007) and comprehension skills from the second grade curriculum guide. The whole class would work on the same story and same skill the following week. The four sample students were introduced to the story and skill a week earlier than the rest of the class. This allowed the participants extra time to make connections to the story by discussing it with the other participants and having an extra week of instruction to strengthen the skills taught. Aside from the intense, small group instruction, introducing the material a week early and allowing the students two full weeks to

internalize and work with the concepts taught, allowed the students to become comfortable with the topic and the researcher noted that the students seemed more eager to participate in the whole class discussion the second week.

The process used in the small group intervention engaged the students and allowed them extra time with the teacher. The students were given focused tasks to help them acquire the knowledge at their own level. The researcher was able to monitor their needs and growth and adjust the instruction appropriately so that the students were successful.

### **Chapter Four**

The results of the research study were quantitative and qualitative. The informal and formal assessments showed the gains made by the four students involved in the study. The qualitative results were based on the researcher's observations and informal notes taken throughout the study. These notes were based on the progress being made each week by each student. The observations and notes included but were not limited to; correct vocabulary usage within the small group discussions, who and how often students were participating (oral reading, discussion, answering questions).

#### **Pre Assessment**

The researcher used the students overall reading MAPs scores as the determinant for which students should qualify for the study. The assessment was given in early January and available online immediately. The results showed that four students were low in their overall reading scores and then the research was guided by their literacy needs which were *word meaning* and *understanding text*. The rank of Lo, Average and Hi are based off of the average score for a student in second grade. If a student received a "lo rank", this means that their score

was at least one standard deviation below the mean. The same is true in reverse for a “hi rank”.

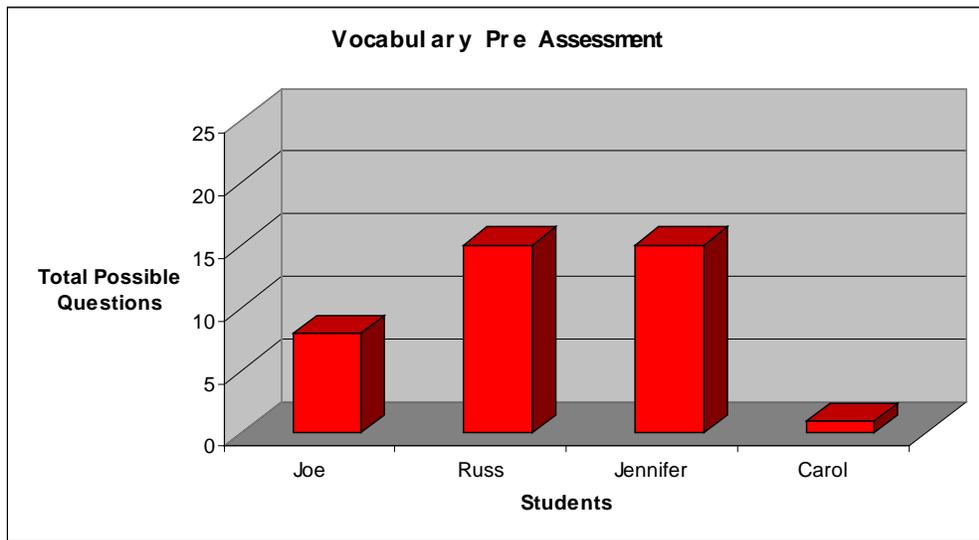
The student performed one standard deviation above the mean.

Pre Assessment: Winter MAP Scores – Reading (breakdown)

Students	Overall Reading Score (mean score 190 )	Word Meaning	Understanding Text
Joe	172	Lo	Lo
Russ	180	Average	Lo
Carol	164	Lo	Lo
Jennifer	185	Lo	Average

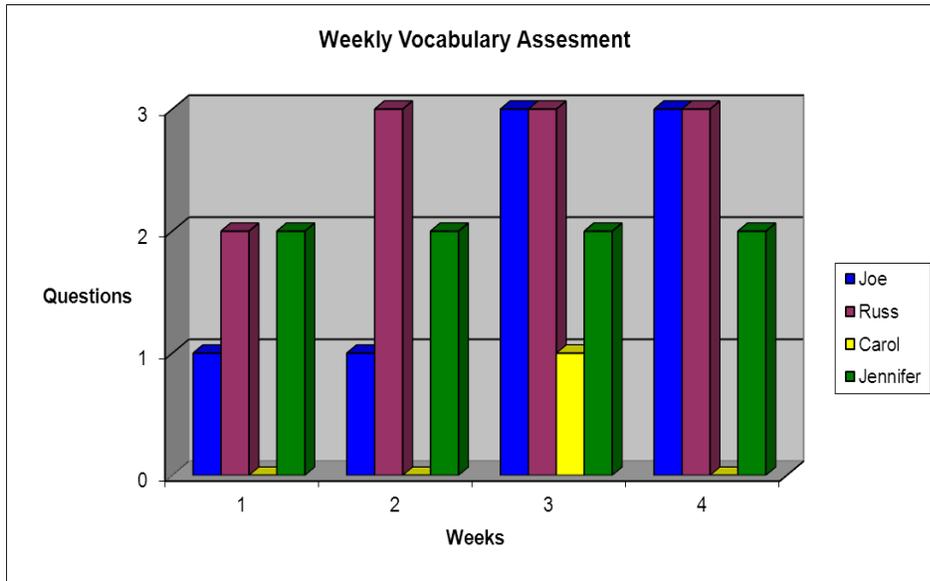
The researcher used a pre-assessment to be sure that the vocabulary words chosen for intervention instruction were not words that the students already knew. The assessment was a simple matching test with 25 words on it. The words were listed in one column and the definitions in the other. The students were asked to match the letter of the definition to the word. The results showed that 2 of the students received over a 50% but that the other 2 students were much lower. This information revealed that none of the students had a strong understanding of all 25 words.

Vocabulary Pre Assessment Graph

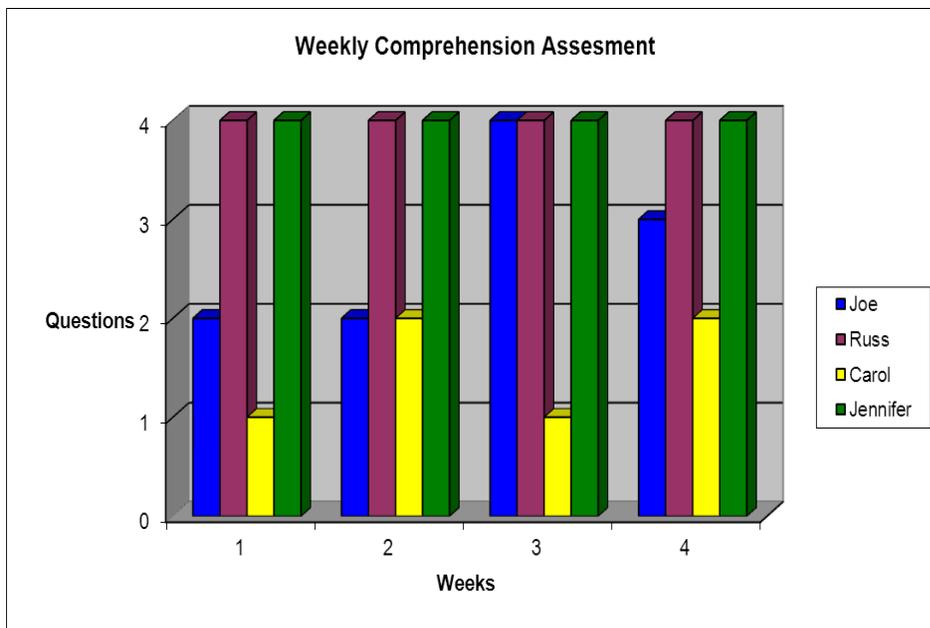


Each week the researcher gave the students an informal assessment on the vocabulary words that were taught that week as well as comprehension questions about the story that the students had read. The assessment was made up of 7 questions total, 3 focused on vocabulary words and 4 on comprehension. The vocabulary questions were sentences and the student needed to choose the word to fill in the blank. The students had a choice of 4 words. The comprehension questions were multiple choice and the students had 3 choices to choose from. The questions were about the content of the stories as well as the genre. The results of each assessment are in the following graphs.

Weekly Vocabulary Graph



Weekly Comprehension Graph



The vocabulary results of the informal assessment indicate that 3 out of the 4 students made gains in their vocabulary acquisition. Their score consistently went up. The researcher also

noted that 3 out of the 4 students were using the vocabulary words in the discussions about the story as well as including them on their graphic organizers. The words were used in the correct context that they were taught. After week two Joe, Russ and Jennifer were consistent with their scores receiving all or 2 out of the 3 words correct. Carol however did not appear to make any gains on the assessments. Her scores stayed at 0 correct and on week 3, 1 correct. The researcher noted that Carol was the only student not using the vocabulary in the small group discussions.

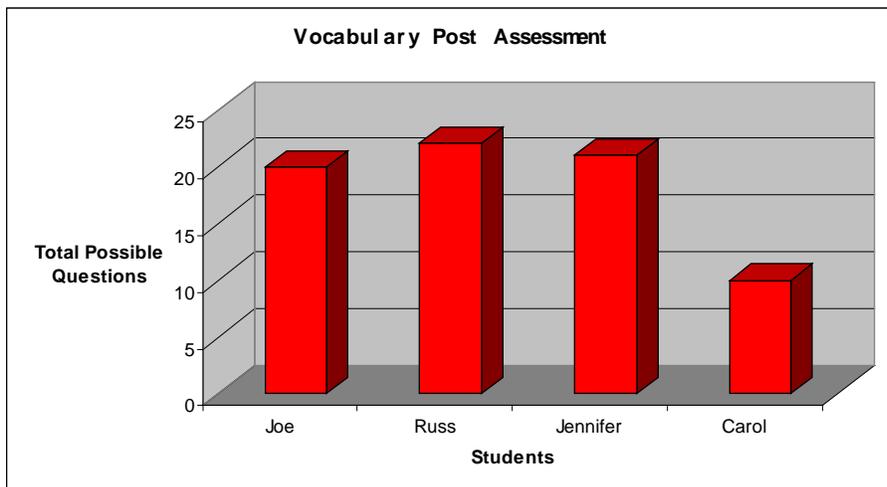
The researcher noted that after week one all of the students were engaged and able to participate in the activities. Joe, Russ and Jennifer were consistently using their vocabulary words in the correct context on their graphic organizers, vocabulary cards and drew pictures to go along with their vocabulary cards that were appropriate with the meaning if the word. Carol was not able to independently write sentences using the words and copied the same picture that Joe had drawn for one on the words. The researcher's observations indicated that she did not appear to be grasping the meaning of the words. The comprehension skills proved to have similar results. Joe, Russ and Jennifer seemed to answer over half of the questions correct after the first two weeks. They made gains in their results. The researcher noted that Joe, Russ and Jennifer were able to understand the questions asked about the story during discussion and make knowledgeable responses. Carol however never received a score over 50%. She was not making progress on the informal assessments.

The researcher noted that the most difficult concept for all of the students to work on was main idea and detail. The students could explain what the main idea was but had trouble picking out supportive details. The researcher observed that all of the students were strong with retell and sequencing the stories events. They were able to order the events on the whiteboard and orally retell the story to the researcher. They also had no trouble with determining beginning, middle

and end o stories. Carol rarely participated in the activities unless she was called on. The other students volunteered answers and participated in discussions about the stories. Joe had a hard time in the beginning of the intervention connecting to the stories. He would rarely offer suggestions as to how the story could connect to his own life. After week two, he seemed to try harder in making those connections. By the end of the intervention he had no problem talking with Russ and Jennifer about the connections he was making.

The researcher administered the same vocabulary assessment that was used as a pre-test to the students at the end of the intervention for a post test. It had the same 25 words on it with matching definitions. All of the students' scores improved and 3 out of the 4 made significant gains. Carol's score was still under 50%.

#### Final Vocabulary Assessment – End of Week 6



The final results of the spring MAP test showed that 3 out of the 4 students made gains in most areas of the test. Each student's score increased and most moved from Lo to average in the breakdown of the sub categories. Joe remained Lo in understanding text and Carol remained lo in both sub categories as well. However the other two students received average scores.

Post Assessment: Spring MAP Scores – Reading (breakdown)

Students	Overall Reading Score (mean score 194 )	Word Meaning	Understanding Text
Joe	187	Average	Lo
Russ	199	Average	Average
Carol	170	Lo	Lo
Jennifer	195	Average	Average

The results show that the students made gains in their vocabulary knowledge and comprehension skills. Their test scores increased as well as their informal vocabulary assessments, comprehension assessments and the researcher noted positive results on their collected work samples from each session. One student still seemed to have trouble in this area. Her test scores only increased slightly and the researcher noted her struggle to work on the activities completed in the small group sessions. As the test result show the small group instruction appeared to have made a positive difference in the literacy skills of the students involved in the study.

### Chapter Five

Chapter five will analyze the results of the small group intervention as it relates to the research in chapter 2 which also focuses on group interventions. The research in chapter two presented strong results that students struggling in reading performed higher on assessments and classroom work if they received small group interventions. These studies provided a structure for the research conducted and presented in this chapter. This chapter will focus on the results of the four students in the intervention group, limitations and strengths of the intervention as well as recommendations for these students for the future.

### **Evaluation of Results**

This section will analyze the results of the small group intervention for each child. It will be broken down by their pre and post MAP test performance as well as their performance on the weekly vocabulary and comprehension questions.

The results of Joe's informal vocabulary assessment increased each week. He appeared to benefit from the repetition of seeing and using the words each day for a week. Joe also received the words a week prior to having to use them in our large group setting which gave him the extra time and practice with the words. Research conducted by Dail and McGee shows that children need to hear and see new words at least 7 times before they become concrete in their mind (Dail & McGee, 2011). His final score on the vocabulary assessment at the end of the intervention was an 80% versus a 32% in the beginning of the intervention. This is average for a second grader and shows impressive gains and improvement over 6 weeks. I also believe that because Joe is an English Language Learner, connecting those words to his personal life, helped him to internalize them and create meaning for himself. Based on research by Michaela Colombo and Patricia Fontaine, ELLs need to connect what they are learning to their lives or they don't feel the importance of what they are learning (Colombo & Fontaine, 2009).

Throughout the sessions Joe was able to participate in the discussion about the stories. However, based on the notes taken throughout the sessions, he could fill in the graphic organizer we used for sequencing but struggled when we worked on main idea and detail. Joe could not identify the main idea of our stories and struggled even more with details. He seemed to try so hard to understand the story while we were reading it that the more complex the task was after reading, the more he seemed to struggle. Joe's comprehension scores did increase. However,

they fluctuated and were not consistent from week to week perhaps he was not able to make more significant gains because he needed to grasp the vocabulary before he could fully understand the multiple choice comprehension questions.

Russ performed average on the pre-assessment MAP test in the area of word meaning. This means that his score was within one standard deviation from the mean. He struggled less than the other 3 students on the informal vocabulary assessment given each week. Russ qualified for the intervention because of his low score on the MAP test in the area of understanding text. Russ made quick progress and thrived in the small group setting.

Russ is a student that tends to perform poorly because of behavior issues rather than academic concerns. He is a student that needs extra attention and providing him that small group setting allowed him to succeed in an area he struggled in. Russ was able to focus for a longer period of time and stayed on task in the small group setting. He participated in the discussions and completed the work done together. This is something that did not happen in the regular classroom setting. Russ was often off task and unable to complete his work. Russ took on a leadership role in the group and was able to help the other three students. Russ' scores on the informal vocabulary and comprehension assessments given each week were consistently high. He performed above average on the post assessment MAP test receiving a score above the mean. The breakdown resulted in average results in word meaning and understanding text. His final vocabulary test was 88%, which is a B average. He made impressive gains on his assessments.

Jennifer's results on the pre-assessment MAP test were opposite of Russ. She performed low in the word meaning section and average in understanding text. Her weekly vocabulary assessments were consistently low and did not show much sign of improvement. However her

final vocabulary assessment and post MAP scores were elevated from the pre assessment. She received 1 point above the mean on her MAP which is average for second grade.

Jennifer suffered the loss of her mother in kindergarten. When that happened she missed a significant amount of school during a crucial development period for literacy. Therefore since that occurrence she has been behind in her reading skills. According to Dail and McGee preschool and kindergarteners' vocabulary development is an integral part of their oral language development, which is critical for literacy skill development (Dail & McGee, 2011).

Jennifer was engaged during all of our sessions. She volunteered answers and participated in discussions. She filled out the graphic organizers we completed together and was successful at recall and sequencing skills. Her struggles were evident during the vocabulary activities. As noted by the researcher she had difficulty using the vocabulary words in sentences and wasn't able to remember their definitions during memory. Jennifer's weekly scores reflected this difficulty. Her end results were positive which shows that the repetition of working with each story for two weeks made a difference in the big picture. It took her those full two weeks of working with the vocabulary words to acquire their meaning. Research conducted by Nelson and Stage shows that vocabulary development happens indirectly and directly (Nelson & Stage, 2007). This means that the direct instruction Jennifer received the first week in a small group setting, helped her indirect instruction she received the following week when she had to read it in the story and apply the words in conversation. While working in the small group setting Jennifer was able to look at the words, make them into flashcards, write them in sentences and hear them used in discussions. The following week when they are used with the whole group she has already had the background knowledge of those words and can read them in a story and use them

in conversation about that story. The repetition and extra time proved successful for Jennifer's success on her MAP test in the area of word meaning.

Carol was the final group member. She received the lowest score on her MAP pre assessment and was considered low in both word meaning and understanding text. On the pre assessment for vocabulary words Carol only got 1 correct out of 25. Carol did not make gains throughout the 6 week intervention. Her weekly informal test scores remained low and the notes taken did not indicate that there was progress being made. Carol's final assessment scores were slightly elevated from the pre assessment scores but not enough to change her status on the MAP test from low to average. Carol still remained 2 standard deviations below the mean and her final vocabulary assessment was only 10 correct out of 25.

Carol had a history of struggling in reading and had been referred for Special Education testing in first grade. The testing was never conducted due to the fact that her parents refused to sign the paper work. Carol tends to struggle in all content areas because she lacks all basic reading skills. She has mastered less than half of the required sight words and doesn't have the phonics skills to decode words. Carol most likely needs an intervention that goes above and beyond what this small group could do for her but I felt as though any focused attention would help.

Carol was able to listen to the story being read each week and could recall and retell the story. She did not struggle in sequencing events or copying what we were writing onto the graphic organizers. Carol could not read what we had written back to the group for review or study purposes. She was not able to study her vocabulary cards and struggled in the vocabulary games that we played. Anything that was read out loud she could understand but was very reluctant to participate in discussion. It was noted that Carol often seemed withdrawn and

embarrassed if called on to answer any questions or to discuss the topic. It was evident by Carol's final assessment scores that she was able to make some gains although very minimal compared to the other students.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

Out of the four students in the small group, three made significant gains in their word meaning and understanding text literacy skills. All of the students increased their overall MAP scores in the areas focused on. As always after conducting any type of lesson there is a need for reflection. After reviewing the data collected and the notes taken, there are areas of the study that could be changed to make it more effective as well as areas that contributed to the students' growth. The following section will focus on the strengths and limitations of the study.

### **Strengths**

I know that there were successful aspects of this study just based on the students MAP scores. The lone fact that they all managed to increase their scores tells me that the small group instruction was effective. Building background knowledge by introducing the vocabulary and story the week before it was studied as a whole group reinforces the skills that the students need work on and allows them to see the material several times. A child needs to be exposed to something at least 7 times before it becomes concrete information (Dail & McGee, 2011). I believe that exposing the children as much as I did aided in their comprehension of the story, the skills being taught and the vocabulary words they learned and used.

Next, I feel that teaching the children using differentiation allowed for all four students to be successful in one area or another. Educators know that all children learn in different ways. In order to reach all children we need to expose them to material using different strategies (Marley

& Szabo, 2010). The students in this group were reading out loud, listening to the story and discussing it. Their vocabulary and reading skills were taught through games, writing, drawing and reciting. They all needed something different in order to succeed.

Another strength of the intervention was the discussion we had about the stories or topics the stories were discussing. Allowing children to express their ideas and tell how the topic connects to their life makes the information real and important to them. Children need to connect what they are learning to their own lives in order to make the information concrete in their mind (Colombo & Fontaine, 2009). I also showed video clips, pictures, or trade books to help them make a mental picture of what we were learning about in case they had not seen or heard of “that” before.

I think the final strength of the intervention was conducting it in a small group setting that was made up of peers with the same needs. All of the students were comfortable with each other. They didn't feel dumb or behind and they knew that they all needed the same kind of support. Making students feel comfortable in any learning situation will allow them to open up and be honest about what they know. Creating a relationship where a child or children can express themselves without judgment creates an opportunity for them to be successful (Oday, 2009).

### **Limitations**

In any teaching situation there are always challenges that present themselves along the way. The most confining limitation for me was the lack of time. I felt as though I could have taken every lesson one step farther to connect with the students but we were always out of time. The students really enjoyed the time we spent together and I feel as though if we had more weeks

and more time in each session I could have made a bigger difference with each of them, especially Carol.

Another limitation of the study was although their needs were the same based on their pre assessments; they all could have used one on one attention. They thrive on that personal attention. Russ was not as much an academic concern as much as he needed someone to invest in him and his education. Jennifer was behind and just needed constant clarification and reassuring. Joe was an ELL therefore his needs were more language based and Carol needed more phonics support. No matter how narrow the topic becomes for small group interventions, the students learn in such different ways it's as though they could all use individualized support.

The final limitation of the intervention was the assessment I chose to evaluate their learning. The MAP test was very effective however the informal assessments I made could have been more specific to the reading strategies we were learning. I tried to make them general comprehension questions and found that I wasn't as successful as I would have liked to be in measuring what skill they learned. A more successful measurement would have been for them to complete a graphic organizer on their own each week about the story that we had discussed and worked together on. I more concerned about them grasping the concept than assessing the skill, it should have been a balance of both.

### **Recommendations**

Based on this intervention, I am able to make many recommendations for all 4 of my students' future learning. This section will discuss strategies and recommendations I have for these students' parents and future teachers so that they may continue to grow and succeed as readers. I will discuss each student and their individual needs.

As stated before, Joe is an English Language Learner; therefore I believe he could benefit from any extra reading or exposure to new vocabulary within a context. He could go to public places with an adult just to learn about those places and the vocabulary that goes along with those “real life” learning experiences. Any opportunity for Joe to build his background knowledge and vocabulary would be an asset to his learning. For example: if he went with his mom or dad to the grocery store or post office. Observing those places and hearing the social situations that occur within those experiences create new knowledge for him that he can recall the next time the class reads a book about food or grocery shopping.

Teachers need to make sure that they are providing opportunities for Joe to learn new vocabulary and engage in social situations that might be new to him. Reader’s Theater would give him a chance to practice conversations that take place in certain situations. Also Joe should be provided with the vocabulary words and pictures or sentences a week in advance to when they will be taught to the whole class. Then he would have a chance to look them over and learn their meaning before he has to use them in a whole group setting.

Joe’s future teachers should try to learn the cultural differences between Joe and his classmates. There are many instances when a teacher asks a student to do something or to respond a certain way that is culturally not acceptable for them. For example: If a teacher were speaking to Joe they would notice that he would be looking at the ground. The teacher may respond by asking Joe to look him/her in the eye. In Joe’s culture it is considered disrespectful to look an adult in the eye. There are many social and cultural differences that ELLs have that teachers are unaware of and this can dramatically change the learning style of the student.

Russ is a student that requires more behavior modifications than academic. Russ is a very intelligent boy who has a difficult time focusing on his school activities. He would rather be

causing trouble and receiving the negative attention of his classmates. I found that Russ thrives on any kind of attention. If he receives individual or small group setting attention he feels accepted and validated therefore he tries harder.

Teachers that will have Russ in their classes need to know that he needs constant positive attention in order to keep him on task. While he worked in the small group with me I made sure to always ask for his input. I gave him a job to do during each session, like keeping track of the time or helping Carol with writing her sentences. He felt good about having to help me and, therefore did his work well. I made sure that he had the opportunity to read aloud or speak in the discussion. Russ was a positive leader if set in the right direction.

Russ also benefited from having the story read out loud. He was able to focus on the content of the story when I was reading which helped him focus on the weekly reading strategy. Russ is an average reader and would have to reread his stories on his own before he could complete any kind of activity that went along with the story. Because of his lack of focus he would rarely have the attention span to reread or to look back in the story to find those answers and would therefore not complete his activities.

Russ is an only child and I believe that he spends more time with adults than he does his peers. He could benefit from some positive social interactions with children his own age, possibly a team or organized play date. I don't think Russ knows how to get positive attention therefore does anything he can to get any attention, including slack in his school work.

Jennifer needs constant support. I would recommend to her teachers and parents that she read as much as possible. She needs to build her vocabulary skills. Jennifer is behind in her reading skills because she missed a significant amount of school. She is very capable and just needs someone pushing her and providing the right kind of differentiation.

For Jennifer's future teachers, I would recommend that she receive some kind of prompt to accompany her vocabulary words in any content area. She would benefit from trade books written at her reading level or pictures that explain what the words mean. Like Joe, Jennifer could use some situations where new vocabulary would be introduced and used in context. She could be buddied up with a student that has a higher reading level than she does. This would allow her to listen to stories rather than always reading them and trying to decipher what the words mean.

If Jennifer had her vocabulary words on flashcards before they were going to be used in the classroom lesson she could practice them at home or on her own. She should not only be reading to someone but also listening to someone read to her. Good readers listen to good reading and try to reproduce those qualities when they read (Kouri & Telander, 2008). Jennifer will reach her grade level reading goals more quickly if she is supported at home and at school.

The recommendations that I have for Carol are severe. Unfortunately even in a small group setting Carol was unable to make the gains (or any significant gains) that I was hoping to see. Her struggle is with the process of reading words, not creating meaning from words or comprehending what is being read. I believe that Carol would benefit from intense one on one reading instruction or be referred for a special education assessment. However seeing as though that road has been approached before and was not successful, as a teacher I need to recommend what can be done in the classroom to help Carol succeed.

In any content area Carol will need someone or something (book or cd) to read the material to her. She is not capable of reading any material on her own. In each content area Carol could have a buddy that would always sit with her and read the material if it was not being read out loud. She also needs support when reading questions or directions for any kind of activity

done. The teacher needs to explicitly explain the activity requirements in order for Carol to understand what is expected of her.

Carol's needs to be in a small group that focuses on the phonetics of reading. The teacher could ask the first grade teachers for material that would help support Carol's reading needs. If possible Carol could join the first grade reading group on a regular basis that is focusing on those skills. This would allow her the opportunity to be with students that are at her level which may make her comfortable and more open to learning.

At home Carl needs to be read to. She needs the same kind of support that I would recommend to a parent of a kindergartener. They need to be exposed to all different kinds of reading as well as books at their level. If someone is available to work on decoding and phonics skills each night, the repetition might help in learning the process.

My last recommendation for Carol is to work with sight word flash cards, at home and at school. She needs to memorize those words that are not phonetic so that she can begin reading sentences. Carol needs more support than a classroom teacher has time for. She is definitely a candidate for Special Education testing.

My final recommendation for all of the students I worked with is to keep reading. They need to read anything that they can. Parents and teachers need to find an interest for their students and look for books on those topics or at the levels appropriate for them. The more a child reads and is exposed to different kinds of texts, the better readers they become (Brown, 2002).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter reviewed the effectiveness of the small group interventions I conducted. The results of this intervention were compared to the research findings presented in chapter two. I

believe this intervention was supported by the previous research and was effective for all of the students involved. I would be confident and comfortable in administering this intervention again for students with similar needs.

The four students involved in this intervention made gains on their post assessments. Although some made more significant gains than others, they were all able to make progress in word meaning or understanding text, if not both. I believe that using multiple strategies within the small groups helped me target each child's learning style. I provided background knowledge before exposing them to new topics so that the material was meaningful for them. This intervention was successful because when working with a small group of children a teacher is able to give them more individualized attention and focus on their learning style and needs. All of the students I worked with could use further instruction in a small group setting and the methods I used could aid in their academic success.

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## Appendix A

## Vocabulary Pre Assessment

- |                      |                                      |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Creating _____    | A. making pictures in your mind      |
| 2. Familiar _____    | B. it is fascinating or exciting     |
| 3. Glamorous _____   | C. things remembered from the past   |
| 4. Imagination _____ | D. something is known Memories       |
| 5. Occasions _____   | E. special events                    |
| 6. Assembled _____   | F. making something new              |
| 7. Forgetting _____  | G. group of objects that go together |
| 8. Devoured _____    | H. to cry or shout suddenly          |
| 9. Menu _____        | I. people who sell things            |
| 10. Fetch _____      | J. a shape                           |
| 11. Simmered _____   | K. defends the goal in a sport       |
| 12. Allowed _____    | L. to make a choice                  |
| 13. Design _____     | M. let something happen              |
| 14. Instrument _____ | N. very strong                       |
| 15. Invented _____   | O. tool used for a special purpose   |
| 16. Powerful _____   | P. thing made by people or machine   |
| 17. Products _____   | Q. plan for making something         |
| 18. Collection _____ | R. made a new thing                  |
| 19. Figure _____     | S. list of foods served              |
| 20. Concern _____    | T. ate quickly                       |
| 21. Exclaimed _____  | U. put it together                   |
| 22. Goalie _____     | V. cooked slowly                     |
| 23. Memories _____   | W. to worry about something          |
| 24. Vendors _____    | X. not remembering                   |
| 25. Selection _____  | Y. go after something                |

## Appendix B

## Vocabulary Post Assessment

1. Creating \_\_\_\_\_
  2. Familiar \_\_\_\_\_
  3. Glamorous \_\_\_\_\_
  4. Imagination \_\_\_\_\_
  5. Occasions \_\_\_\_\_
  6. Assembled \_\_\_\_\_
  7. Forgetting \_\_\_\_\_
  8. Devoured \_\_\_\_\_
  9. Menu \_\_\_\_\_
  10. Fetch \_\_\_\_\_
  11. Simmered \_\_\_\_\_
  12. Allowed \_\_\_\_\_
  13. Design \_\_\_\_\_
  14. Instrument \_\_\_\_\_
  15. Invented \_\_\_\_\_
  16. Powerful \_\_\_\_\_
  17. Products \_\_\_\_\_
  18. Collection \_\_\_\_\_
  19. Figure \_\_\_\_\_
  20. Concern \_\_\_\_\_
  21. Exclaimed \_\_\_\_\_
  22. Goalie \_\_\_\_\_
  23. Memories \_\_\_\_\_
  24. Vendors \_\_\_\_\_
  25. Selection \_\_\_\_\_
- A. making pictures in your mind
  - B. it is fascinating or exciting
  - C. things remembered from the past
  - D. something is known Memories
  - E. special events
  - F. making something new
  - G. group of objects that go together
  - H. to cry or shout suddenly
  - I. people who sell things
  - J. a shape
  - K. defends the goal in a sport
  - L. to make a choice
  - M. let something happen
  - N. very strong
  - O. tool used for a special purpose
  - P. thing made by people or machine
  - Q. plan for making something
  - R. made a new thing
  - S. list of foods served
  - T. ate quickly
  - U. put it together
  - V. cooked slowly
  - W. to worry about something
  - X. not remembering
  - Y. go after something

Appendix C  
Informal Assessment: Vocabulary & Comprehension  
Week One

Directions: Circle the letter of the best answer to each question.

1. Why is this story called “Stirring Up Memories”?
  - a. She is remembering things that happened to her in the past.
  - b. She loves to stir things in a pot like her grandmother.
  - c. She likes to make up characters and stories.
  
2. What is the first thing Pam does when she is creating a story?
  - a. Write the story
  - b. Find an idea
  - c. Sprinkle her ideas with imagination
  
3. Where do most writers look to find their stories?
  - a. Far away
  - b. By looking inside themselves
  - c. From other people
  
4. What kind of selection is this?
  - a. Fiction
  - b. Fantasy
  - c. Autobiography

5. Rob was \_\_\_\_\_ a new robot with his Legos.
- memories
  - imagination
  - familiar
  - creating
6. Use your \_\_\_\_\_ to create a picture in your mind.
- imagination
  - selection
  - forgetting
  - menu
7. Mary had wonderful \_\_\_\_\_ of her vacation with her family.
- time
  - memories
  - glamorous
  - concern

Appendix D  
Informal Assessment: Vocabulary & Comprehension  
Week Two

Directions: Circle the letter of the best answer to each question.

8. Who is the main character?
- d. Rosa Maria
  - e. Little Catalina
  - f. The mice
9. What is the setting of the story?
- d. Little Catalina's house
  - e. The market
  - f. Rosa Maria's house
10. What happened at the end of the story?
- d. Rosa Maria sets a mousetrap and goes to bed.
  - e. Rosa Maria gives the mice leftovers and never sets another mousetrap.
  - f. Little Catalina breaks the piñata
11. What kind of selection is this?
- d. Realistic Fiction
  - e. Fantasy
  - f. Non-Fiction

12. We \_\_\_\_\_ our new swing set in the backyard.

- a. assembled
- b. fetch
- c. menu
- d. glamorous

13. Our dog will \_\_\_\_\_ the ball if you throw it.

- a. forgetting
- b. selection
- c. fetch
- d. devoured

7. At the restaurant, I loved everything on the \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. sidewalk
- b. memories
- c. fetch
- d. menu

## Appendix E

Informal Assessment: Vocabulary & Comprehension  
Week Three

Directions: Circle the letter of the best answer to each question.

14. How are all the inventors in this article alike?

- g. They were all slaves.
- h. They were all born after slavery ended.
- i. They are all African American.

15. Who made the first clock in North America and wrote an almanac?

- g. Benjamin Banneker
- h. Sarah Goode
- i. George Washington Carver

16. Who was called “the plant doctor” and made products from peanuts?

- g. Patricia Bath
- h. George Washington Carver
- i. Benjamin Banneker

17. What kind of selection is this?

- g. Fiction
- h. Fantasy
- i. Biography

18. There was a \_\_\_\_\_ earthquake in California.

- e. selection
- f. design
- g. powerful
- h. invented

19. Thomas Edison \_\_\_\_\_ the light bulb.

- e. forgetting
- f. invented
- g. allowed
- h. powerful

7. The flute is a musical \_\_\_\_\_.

- e. sidewalk
- f. instrument
- g. design
- h. menu