

The Importance of Teaching

Sight Words



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Imagine living in a world where you are not able to read, write or speak the native language. Perhaps you are in a foreign country on vacation. Reading basic things would be a challenge for you. Street signs, maps, cereal boxes, and warning labels are just a bunch of letters with no meaning and relevance because you are unable to decipher them. If you were on vacation in this situation, what would you do? Some people would just try to blend in and perhaps learn some basic words and phrases to just get by. Others might be so frustrated that they give up and go home. And then there might be a few who stay the course and try to find supports and intervention that would assist them in making sense of this foreign language. But just try to imagine how this same scenario would feel if this was your life every day... and you are seven? I work with students that are living in this nightmare. Day after day, and year after year, they struggle with literacy, and become increasingly more frustrated. I am afraid that someday some of these struggling readers in my class might just give up and go home, not planning to return to an environment that has been unable to help them for so long. Why should they return to a place where they feel like they do not fit in? Why return to a place that supplies frustration and anxiety regularly? No one individual or intervention has helped so far, so why continue? I want to help change the course for these struggling readers. I want to steer them on a path to finding supports and interventions for what is already an epidemic in their world.

Twelve students in my 2nd grade class are reading below grade level. Of those 12 students, ten are reading at or significantly below a 1st grade level in both fluency and comprehension. Two students are considered non-readers. As an educator committed to the profession, and someone who understands the value that education has on all children, it's frustrating to learn that there are 7 and 8 year old children that are still unable to read, cannot identify all the letters in the

alphabet, and have difficulty identifying letter sounds. This practice of continually passing students on to the next grade, in my opinion, is criminal.

I have observed my students' frustration as they lower their heads and hope not to be called upon, develop stomach aches or even cry during reading activities because they are overwhelmed. Throughout the day I have also observed these same students sit and actively listen when a story is read aloud to them and raise their hands to participate and share their thinking after the story has concluded. This shows that these students have the ability and the desire to learn and want to be participants in the learning process. These students may never achieve "benchmark" status on state mandated assessments. However, I feel that there is little opportunity for students to be successful at any grade if they do not have the basic foundation and fundamentals in reading. With the focus of instruction consistently on standardized assessments, it is imperative that I find ways to support my students and develop targeted strategies and interventions that may help them succeed.

School and Instructional Context

I am an 18 year veteran of the Chicago Public School system. I currently teach in a school for students in Pre-K through 8th grades on the west side of Chicago. When I first began teaching at this school in 2005, student enrollment was 607. During 2012-2013, student enrollment declined to 313 students, possibly due to the opening of three charter schools in the nearby area.

Currently there are 706 students enrolled in my school, due to a CPS school closure in the neighborhood. Attendance is a significant problem. During the 2012-2013 school year 50% of our student population was considered chronically truant and the mobility rate was 30%.

Attendance and tardiness are still significant concerns. I have taught at this school for eight

years. During this time I have observed a limited amount of parent participation, and there are no PTA or PTO organizations for parents to join.

ISAT data from the 2012-2013 school year showed that 37.9% of our students met or exceeded state standards in reading, which is an increase from 2011-2012 when there were 34.1% of the students that met or exceeded the goal. The school community is 98% African-American and 2% multiracial. This school is in a community that is economically in decline and sits among high crime rates and gang violence. From August 8 through September 13, 2013, there were 286 cases of quality of life crimes (narcotics, prostitution, and criminal damage) and 42 violent crimes (robbery, battery, assault, homicide, and criminal sexual assault). Many residents living within this community have substance abuse issues, and there is a lack of employment opportunities. Recent statistics indicate that 95.2% of the community residents are considered low income families, and students from these families receive free meals at school.

I have 30 students in my 2nd grade class (15 girls/15 boys) that range in age from 7 through 8. There are no special education students within this classroom. Four students have an IEP for speech services. Based on formal and informal assessments and daily observations of students, the reading abilities within this classroom vary greatly and span from non-readers to students that are reading at a 3rd grade proficiency level. The varied learning styles and academic differences within this classroom setting make differentiation of instruction a challenge and require that I teach in a variety of ways. Therefore, I prepare small group lessons to accommodate the differences in learning styles and academic abilities within this group.

We have an excellent and supportive administrative team at this school. Our administrative leaders demonstrate compassion for students and staff, and are constantly striving to improve

academic success for our students as well as improve the overall climate within the school. We have partnered with several companies to ensure the academic success of our students, and have implemented many mentoring programs for the academic and social welfare of students.

Literature Review

Literacy development is the building block upon which all learning begins. A student's inability to read, and read fluently, limits comprehension and ultimately affects all content areas.

Students who do not receive quality literacy instruction in the primary grades are less likely to be fluent readers and more likely to be at risk for ongoing academic failure. In order "to prevent reading difficulties, and promote reading success, it is essential that children receive early and appropriate learning experiences that promote the acquisition of literacy skills." (Good, Gruba & Kaminski, 1990, pp. 680) Fluent reading is a predictor for academic success, and long term intellectual, social, and academic benefits are related to early interventions. Students that cannot read are at an increased risk of academic failure if drastic steps are not taken to correct and remediate reading deficiencies.

Data that I obtained from my school district shows that 95.2% of students in this community are from low income homes. Research demonstrates that low reading abilities can be attributed to poverty. "Students from economically disadvantaged communities are at a greater risk of academic failure... stemming from the lack of academic preparedness, [and] young children living in poverty [are] at special risk of school failure." (Schweinhart, 1994, pp. 237) There are real consequences to being a poor reader in society, and the prevalence of low literacy effects everyday situations. Students that are unable to read will face long term academic struggles and

potential hardships as adults, and it is imperative to address their literacy needs in the primary grades to ensure ongoing academic success and social development.

My review of quantitative DIBELS data collected at the beginning of the year demonstrates that eight students within this class are reading at or far below a 1st grade proficiency level. This data demonstrates that I need to address the reading deficits within my classroom to improve reading fluency and comprehension. “Using intervention strategies targeting individual needs will ultimately improve reading proficiency [and] preempt reading difficulties.” (Good et al., 1990, pp. 685) It is my belief that previous instruction could be a cause for the lack of reading ability for some students. Some students may not have received the necessary prerequisite instruction in Kindergarten or first grade, or may not have attended a preschool program that promoted early literacy development. Student attendance is also a factor that effects literacy development. My review of school attendance data indicates that 93.1% of students within this setting attend school regularly. Students cannot receive the proper instruction to develop reading proficiency if they are not in school. Two students within my class that are reading below a kindergarten proficiency level have poor attendance and are frequently absent or tardy. Daily and consistent student attendance is a key component to academic success. My observations of students engaged in literacy activities have demonstrated that the students who are not fluent readers within this class lack a mastery of high frequency sight words. I have found that these students spend a significant amount of time decoding words rather than having an automatic recall of the commonly used sight words.

Researchers know that there are a variety of ways to teach reading, and the strategies and interventions utilized will differ depending upon the needs of the students. Reading involves the distinct, but highly correlated skills, of word identification and comprehension. Torgesen, Rashotte & Alexander (2001, pp. 333) find that “difficulties in word recognition will significantly affect a student’s ability to comprehend what is being read”. Reading fluency, which “has been identified as a key component in reading and learning to read” (Rasinski, Homan & Biggs, 2004), and “the speed and accuracy with which single words are identified is the best predictor of comprehension” (Hook & Jones, 2004, pp.16). Phonics is the most commonly used method to teach reading. Decoding words involves understanding the alphabetic principle, letter sound correspondences, and recoding unfamiliar words into a pattern that is recognizable. However, this process of word analysis decreases reading fluency and hinders reading comprehension. To counter this, Good, et al. (1990) and Diller (2007, pp. 69) suggests that teachers focus on teaching sight words to students so that beginning readers can recognize commonly used words quickly and easily and that this will lead to improvements in reading comprehension. Sight words make up more than 50% of what is presented to students in textbooks, and “skilled reading involves the ability to read individual words accurately and quickly in isolation as well as in text” (Stanovich, 1980, pp. 32-33). When “text is read in a laborious and inefficient manner, it will be difficult for the child to remember what has been read...” (NICHD.NIH.gov, 2006, pp. 11), and students will be unable to relate to the ideas expressed within the text. In the following paragraphs I will discuss research which supports the importance of teaching sight words to early readers.

Ehri & Wilce (1983) conducted an experiment with younger skilled and older less skilled students reading at second and fourth grade levels. During this experiment, students read familiar object words (“book”, “man”, “car”, “tree”), words with a consonant-vowel-consonant pattern, non-words (“baf”, “jad” and “nel”) and named single digits. The researchers found that when presented with familiar words, both groups of students read them much faster than the unfamiliar or non-words, and that these students were able to automatically name single digits. This research demonstrates that reading high frequency sight words from memory, rather than decoding words while reading, will lead to improved reading fluency and, ultimately, greater reading comprehension.

Ehri (1992, pp. 168-169) found that “when reader’s eyes alight on a word [that is] known by sight, the word’s identity is triggered in memory very rapidly.” Memorizing high frequency sight words is a better reading strategy to increase fluency because traditional instructional methods, like phonics for decoding, are time consuming and decrease reading comprehension. My observations of students engaged in literacy activities have demonstrated that the students who are not fluent readers lack a mastery of high frequency sight words. I have found that these students spend a significant amount of time decoding words and do not have automatic recall of the commonly used sight words. Ehri (2005, pp. 167-188) found that “sight words can be defined as words that are instantly recognized and are words with irregular spellings that cannot be decoded” through conventional use of phonetic rules. With frequent practice, reading sight words becomes automatic, and “readers can recognize their pronunciations... automatically without attention or effort” to decoding (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974, pp. 293-294). Reading fluency and comprehension become more efficient with ongoing

practice, and once children know the words on the high frequency word list, they can slow down their reading to focus on the text's meaning.

Velasco and Zizak (2000) found that second and third grade students have increased independent and instructional reading levels and higher posttests scores on high frequency words, when presented with a balanced literacy program that includes sight word instruction. They claim that sight word instruction increases fluency and comprehension, as these are dependent on the automatic recall of sight words. Students need to be actively engaged in their reading and make direct connections to the text and with the text in order to develop understanding, and this can only be achieved through fluent reading. Duke, Pressley, and Hilden (2004) note that word recognition and reading fluency difficulties may be a concern for upwards of 90% of children with significant problems in comprehension. Addressing the needs of my students through the direct instruction and use of sight words would greatly assist them in achieving both reading fluency and reading comprehension. There is no evidence to suggest that teaching children to memorize high frequency sight words is harmful to literacy development. As I have shown above, the research clearly links learning to read high frequency sight words from memory to increased fluency and comprehension. If more than 50% of the words within textbooks are composed of high frequency sight words, the automatic recall and reading of these words is an integral part of instruction. Research demonstrates that explicit instruction of the high frequency sight words is necessary, and students need to efficiently move through text in a fluent manner to increase comprehension. Teaching students to memorize high frequency sight words is a more effective strategy to increase reading fluency and comprehension than phonics and decoding strategies.

Question:

What happens when I put more emphasis on teaching sight words to my second grade class?

Sub-Questions:

1. What happens to students' attitudes toward books and reading?
2. How do students' perception(s) of themselves change as a reader?
3. Did reading fluency and comprehension improve with the implementation of a sight word program?
4. Did students' attitudes about school change?

Data Collection Methods:

1. Case study of five students. I selected the two students with highest reading proficiency and the two students with the lowest reading proficiency (one male and one female from each – 4 total), and I used random selection for the fifth student in the case study.
2. I collected and analyzed DIBELS reading fluency and reading comprehension data from assessments at the BOY and EOY.
3. I generated anecdotal records. I collected information based on my observations of individuals, whole group work, and small group activities. I also collected anecdotal records to be used as evidence with my case studies.
4. I photographed, videotaped and conducted student interviews (1:1 and small group).
5. Student Exit Slips.
5. Weekly reflection(s): My own personal reflection journal

Data and Interpretations:

At the beginning of the year it is important to me that I understand each child's perception(s) of them self as a reader. During the first week of school I conducted a survey and I asked the

students to generate a written response to “Do you think that you are a good reader? Explain.” I did this because understanding how my students perceive themselves as readers guides my instruction, allows me to determine which student(s) may need support to build self-esteem, and also provides insight into what the students perceive is their strength and/or weakness in reading. From the written responses I learned that 28 of the 30 students identified themselves as a good reader.

Manny responded “I think I’m a good Reader Because every day I go to The library I notice I get Better and Better.” Manny is reflective and gives his own perception of himself as a reader. He evaluates himself and it appears that he perceives his improvement in reading is due to his attendance at the library. Manny reads effortlessly and with expression, and a fluency assessment administered in September, 2013 demonstrated that he is reading 117 WPM.

Manny’s independent reading comprehension at the beginning of the year was assessed at a level L which, according to Fountas and Pinnell, is equivalent to a 3rd grade reading proficiency. He is a good decoder, understands much of what he reads independently, and knows the meanings many of the words he reads. He is reading far above grade level according to January, 2014 NWEA assessment data. When I asked Manny this same question in a video interview he responded “I think I am a **great** reader...because I read every day at home.” Manny told me that he reads at home with his mother and younger siblings. The parent understands the value of reading with her children and takes time to engage **the family** in this practice. The home/school connection is important to academic achievement. I selected Manny to look at closely because I thought that it was interesting that he mentioned his mother. I interpreted this statement to mean that he recognized the importance of his mother in his academic achievement. Manny is the only student in the class that mentioned help at home during 1:1 interviews.

Nancy also identified herself as a good reader. She explains “im a good reader because... I practice everyday and hour.” I interpret this statement to mean that Nancy connects her daily reading practice with her academic achievement. Being aware of the value of this practice, and understanding its importance as it relates to being a proficient reader, is significant in the development in reading proficiency. Nancy reads efficiently and effortlessly. Her reading is fluent but unexpressive. In September, 2013 Nancy was assessed as reading 103 WPM. Nancy’s independent reading comprehension at the beginning of the year was assessed at a level M which, according to Fountas and Pinnell, is equivalent to a 3rd grade reading proficiency. She has good vocabulary and can often identify word meanings by using context and picture clues. She tested above grade level in January, 2014 on the NWEA reading assessment.

Mary is an 8 year old girl who identified herself as occasionally being a good reader. Mary wrote “sometimes I be a good reader.” I asked Mary to explain what she likes about reading. She replied “stories. I like stories with characters. Like Lilly. She is funny to me.” Mary is referring to Lilly’s Purple Plastic Purse by Kevin Henkes. Mary lives with her aunt because her mother is deceased. “Mary told me today that her mother got shot.” (Teacher Journal dated February, 2014) This startled me. I immediately began to ask questions. Later that day I spoke to a member of our administrative team about the event. I was told that in 2013 Mary’s mother was killed in an event that involved gun violence and it appears that Mary may have witnessed the event. “I cannot imagine how this has impacted her. She talks as if it happened yesterday. Perhaps she relives the event regularly...almost as if it were yesterday.” (Teacher Journal February, 2014) Mary receives speech services twice per week for 30 minutes each session. She has a severe stutter which impacts her ability to speak and read fluently. Mary read 30 WPM in September, 2013 using the DIBELS reading fluency assessment. Her independent reading level

was assessed at a level C which is kindergarten proficiency. During a weekly fluency assessment administered April 23, 2014, Mary was able to read 73 WPM. In a journal entry dated April 25, 2014 I wrote “Mary’s reading fluency is so inconsistent. On 4/8 she read 49 WPM and the other day 73. I need to take a closer look at those passages and try to identify the disparity in the reading fluency.” I have noticed that Mary reads more fluently when the environment is calm and quiet. The school environment is extremely loud. Our classroom is also near the staircase that is used as the entrance and exit to recess and lunch. Finding a quiet place to read is sometimes a challenge.

Joe identified himself as not being a good reader. His reading fluency and independent reading comprehension have been assessed as below kindergarten. In September, 2013 Joe read 0 WPM on a DIBELS fluency assessment. His independent reading level was assessed at a level B which is the beginning of the year expectation for a kindergarten student. His reading is labored and he struggles with basic letter sounds. I knew that Joe would state that he was not a “good reader.” What I was looking for was his explanation and words that could describe his idea of what is/is not a good reader. Joe wrote “I am not a...” but did not write anything else after that. Later that day I conferred with Joe in a one on one setting. He sat with his head down, staring into his lap, and not making eye contact. I asked Joe to explain why he did not think that he was a good reader. At first he said nothing. I again prompted with “can you tell me a reason why you don’t think you are a good reader?” No response. I then asked “Is there something that you do that you think a good reader might not do?” With this question his eyes lifted to mine. He stated “I mix up the d’s and b’s.” This self awareness and his inability to fix it startled me. It is as though he never had anyone ask him this before or no one ever noticed. I then asked “Do you like when someone reads to you?” He nodded to indicate yes. I knew the answer to this

question before asking it. Joe is always the first one to the carpet during our read aloud and actively engages and volunteers to respond to text related questions. This demonstrates that Joe does enjoy reading, despite his struggles with independent reading. He does have the ability to comprehend material read, and it is his inability to read material independently that is hindering his academic progress.

Nona is another student that identified herself as not being a good reader. It is sad and exhausting to listen to Nona read as she struggles and labors through the words. Her inability to correctly identify letter sounds diminishes her ability to decode words. Nona struggles with short and long vowel sounds and is uncertain about the sounds of many letters in the alphabet. Nona currently has a reading proficiency that is less than kindergarten. In January, 2014 she was able to read 9 WPM which is an improvement from September, 2013 when she read 0 WPM. Her independent reading level is a level B which is kindergarten reading comprehension. One identified cause for the lack of reading proficiency is Nona's attendance. Nona does not attend school consistently and to date has missed a total of 40 days of school. I have had multiple conversations with Nona's mother where I leave hopeful and optimistic. I have informed Nona's mother that the lack of consistent attendance in school is hindering Nona's overall academic progress and is directly related to her current reading/functioning level. I met with Nona's mother in November, 2013 during report card pick up. She explained that she works nights and cannot always get home in time to ensure that Nona attends school daily. She also stated that she cannot afford to leave work early, and does not always have reliable and consistent childcare. I explained that it is challenging for me to provide consistent and relevant instruction when Nona's attendance is sporadic. I thought that my conversation with Nona's mother was productive and

our discussion about attendance and the need for her daughter to be in school daily was understood. Unfortunately, Nona was not in attendance the following day.

In a journal entry dated November 15, 2013 I wrote “while standing in line today at Starbucks waiting to buy my \$5.00 cup of coffee I thought about my conversation with Nona’s mother. How sad and frustrating it must be for her to want to do what she knows is right for her child but circumstances force her to choose between the education of her child and their ultimate survival.”

I feel frustrated when situations occur within my classroom that I cannot control. But I also need to think about how the parents and the children that are impacted as well. Perhaps, Nona’s mother is also overwhelmed and frustrated by circumstances. Other than allowing myself to become frustrated I need to be solution oriented and think about ways I might be able to assist both the student and the parent. Many of the problems that I face each day are out of my control but also impact and impede the instruction that I am trying to provide on a daily basis. Rather than allow myself to become a defeatist I need to focus on what I can do to assist Nona when she is in school rather than being concerned with the number of days she has missed.

At the beginning of the year (BOY) I collected reading proficiency data (DIBELS) to determine the instructional needs of my students. This data also allows me to determine what I will need to do in order to plan for instruction.

READING PROFICIENCY IN MY CLASS:

Fluency & Comprehension levels	No. of Students BOY
Non-reader	2
K-1 st grade	10
2 nd grade	10
3 rd grade	8

The data that I collected shows that almost 50% of the students in my 2nd grade class are not fluent readers and reading significantly below grade level. I find this data to be alarming. Their inability to read text in a fluent manner limits their independent reading comprehension. It is imperative that I identify the specific skills and reading deficiencies of these students and plan instruction and interventions that can assist them in developing reading proficiency. My concern regarding the very low reading level of some of my students caused me to focus more on teaching sight words. Within the first few weeks of school I had already begun implementing a program that involved explicit teaching of the sight words to my students. Each week students would be given a list of 8-10 sight words to memorize. I would do a daily check in with each student using flash cards in a 1:1 setting to monitor individual progress and record data. This daily gathering of data assisted me in determining which students needed more intensive instructional support throughout the week. I used this data to prepare daily mini-lessons and small group activities for those students that demonstrated that they may need additional support. Joe has told me that he does not have assistance at home with practicing the sight words. I meet with Joe daily to review sight words using flash cards. I use the “fold in technique” with Joe

(Appendix A). Joe is assigned 2-3 words each day and he is given flash cards to take home to practice. The following day we begin by reviewing the 2-3 words he was assigned the previous day to insure that he practiced at home. I then “fold in” or add one new word with the previous words. I do this so that Joe is not overwhelmed and this also allows him to feel some measure of success. This daily repetition and instructional intervention also helps to supplement the assistance that Joe is not receiving at home. Joe was usually unable to recall the sight words from day to day. We would practice daily and he was able to remember a few of the words during our review and practice time. However, Joe had difficulty recalling the same words on the following day. Joe only passed two of the 30 weekly sight word tests that we have had throughout the school year.

Nona’s mother works evenings and she has informed me that there is not always someone willing or readily available to work with Nona on the sight words. I developed an activity for Nona which allows for independent practice of the sight words. I write each sight word on a flash card and number them 1-10. I record myself reading the sight words, in order, on to a standard tape recorder/audio cassette. Nona listens to me read the words and follows along with the flash cards. Nona has various numbered cassettes and word card sets that she can use and review. Nona also has headphones and batteries for the recorder in the event that she is not in an environment where she can plug the tape player into an outlet. Because Nona does not attend school regularly I am providing a consistent way for her to practice the sight words. I am addressing Nona’s instructional needs as well as showing the parent that I am sympathetic to her situation. I am disappointed that Nona was not more successful with the sight words, and it appears that she was not studying as often as I would have hoped.

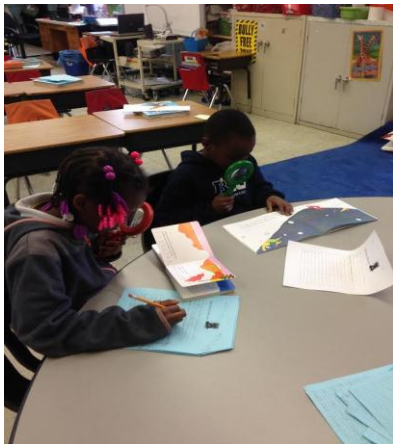
“Nona passed three of the 30 weekly sight word tests that we have had throughout the school year. Her inability to read/identify sight words will impact her education now and in the future. I wonder what will happen to her in 3rd grade when the shift from learning to read becomes reading to learn. She will be lost and eventually become another statistic in some form or fashion. I know I tried my best...but why do I feel lousy and feel like I have failed her?” (Teacher journal dated 4-26-2014)

I developed an activity called Puppet Reader based on an observation. “I wonder why students always seem to go and get a puppet in the library *before* selecting a book during DEAR (Drop Everything and Read) time. What is it about the puppets that makes the DEAR time more interesting?” (Teacher Journal dated 9-19-2013). I thought using the puppets would be a great opportunity to capitalize on the students’ need for “play” while encouraging reading and reinforcing the recognition of sight words. During Puppet Reader, students read to a puppet or the puppet “reads” to them. In a 1:1 interview with Trey about Puppet Reader he stated “It be fun because you get to read to somebody instead of reading to yourself. And you can make the puppets read to you.” (Puppet Reader: 11-2013)



The Puppet Reader activity can be completed independently, in pairs, or in a small group. When there are multiple copies of a particular book I have observed that it becomes a competition to see who can locate more sight words or find them the fastest. I believe that having this competition demonstrates that students are familiar with the sight words and perhaps being able to recall the sight words quickly will improve reading fluency.

Another reading activity involving sight word identification is Sight Word Detective. During this time students are once again asked to find and locate sight words independently, in pairs or small groups, and record the sight word they have found on a Sight Word Detective Sheet (Appendix B). Students use a magnifying glass while reading, like a detective looking for clues, within the text. Large hanging charts with words that were used during previous weeks are hung in the classroom. If students are unsure whether a particular word is/is not a sight word they can use the charts to confirm or deny their thinking.



(Sight Word Detective 5-13-2014)

During read aloud time I have also asked students to identify sight words on a given page that I have read. I think this activity keeps students engaged and focused during the reading, and reminds them to think about the sight words. “Today Jaileen raised his hand during my reading

of Owen. When I called on him he told me that I forgot a sight word on the page I had just read. I asked him to show me the word I had forgotten. He pointed to the work and I then asked him to read it to me. He read the word was. He then smiled and then returned to his seat.” (Teacher Journal dated October, 2013) Jaylen is usually fidgety during shared reading time but when I ask students to look for specific words or locate sight words on a page that I have read I find that he is more engaged in the reading.

We also play a Memory Match Game with the sight words in pairs or small groups. Sight words are printed on card stock and placed face down. Each student gets an opportunity to turn over two cards and try to make a match. The player needs to read the words on the cards they have selected. If a match was made the student can only keep the cards if they were able to read the words. The cards are returned to the game if the student was unable to correctly read the words. The player with the most pairs at the end of the game is the winner. This game reinforces the recognition and memorization of the sight words in a game, and it is my hope that it will ultimately lead to improvements in reading fluency.

“The kids seemed to enjoy the Memory March Game today. I created this game because I remembered how boring school can be with the basic memorization of facts. I understand the importance of play in the life of a child and combining fun with the learning goals I want to accomplish is more effective than rote memorization.” (Teacher Journal dated 9-2013)

READING PROFICIENCY IN MY CLASS:

Fluency & Comprehension levels	No. of Students BOY	No. of Students EOY
Non-reader	2	2
K-1 st grade	10	3
2 nd grade	10	6
3 rd grade	8	11
4 th grade	0	8

From my end of the year data it appears that explicitly teaching students to read and recognize sight words is important to improving reading fluency and comprehension based on the increased proficiency levels within my class. Twenty-eight of the thirty students demonstrated improvements in reading proficiency. There are 11 students that are still reading below grade level despite their improvement in reading fluency, and two of those students are considered non-readers because they read less than 10 WPM.

At the beginning of the year I had 10 students who had a kindergarten-1st grade reading proficiency level and that number has been reduced to three. There were a total of 8 students reading at a third grade proficiency level, and EOY data shows that 19 students are reading at or above a third grade proficiency level, which is more than 50% of my 2nd grade class. The increase in reading proficiency demonstrates the importance of explicitly teaching sight words. Most students were able to make gains greater than 1 year in reading proficiency, and this type of

instruction could ultimately support struggling readers in all grade levels, and be used to support adult learners that are less than proficient in reading.

Case Study Updates:

Manny went from reading 135 WPM at the beginning of the year to 182 WPM at the end of the year. His independent reading comprehension proficiency improved from a level L to a Level P which is equivalent to a 4th grade reading proficiency.

Joe read 0 WPM at the beginning of the year and is now reading 4 WPM. His independent reading comprehension did not improve from the beginning of the year. It is important to note that Joe needed glasses all school year. I made several phone calls to the parent about the importance of his glasses and I provided resources that offered free eye exams and glasses for CPS students. We also had a free vision screening at the school and his guardian did not sign the permission form. Joe *finally* got his glasses on May 10, 2014. He spent the entire year trying to learn to read when his major challenge was just being able to see the words and letters properly. Yet another example of how and why I become frustrated. Joe was referred for RTI (Response to Intervention) services in October, 2013; however, he was denied services because he did not have his glasses. Sadly, Joe will be passed on to 3rd grade according to CPS Promotion Policy. His 3rd grade teacher will need to begin the process of collecting evidence and anecdotal records and refer him for future RTI services. Hopefully he won't lose or break his glasses before then.

Mary's fluency score doubled from 30 to 60 WPM despite her severe stutter. Even though her reading fluency is impacted by her stutter it cannot diminish her comprehension. Mary was reading at a Level C at the beginning of the year and is now reading a Level L. This increase

demonstrates a growth from kindergarten proficiency to middle of the year 2nd grade. Purposeful sight word instruction allowed Mary to focus on the text and read for meaning rather than trying to decode words.

Nona's fluency improved as well. She went from reading 3 WPM at the beginning of the year to 9 WPM at the end of the year despite her sporadic attendance in school. "I wonder how much more progress could have been made if Nona actually attended school regularly?" (Teacher journal dated 5-10-2014) Her reading comprehension did not improve, and her independent reading proficiency remains below a kindergarten level.

Nancy's reading fluency improved. She read 149 WPM at the end of the year which is an increase of 46 WPM. Her reading proficiency also improved and she is now reading at a level P. Although Nancy was reading above level at the beginning of the year, it is important to note that she now has an independent reading proficiency of a 4th grade student. I find myself thinking "Wouldn't it make sense to have a walking reading program for students like Nancy who have an above reading proficiency level? How can the school best support her reading progress, continue to challenge her, and ensure her ongoing academic success? (Teacher journal dated May 15, 2014) I think that school communities need to support struggling readers as well as support those students that are advanced. I found that differentiating instruction this year within a class that had so many different reading abilities was a challenge. I found ways to differentiate; however, is this the norm within schools or will Nancy become someone who is left unchallenged next year while the teacher deals with the larger population of struggling readers?

Conclusion:

I wonder how students like Joe and Nona have been allowed to become essentially non-readers within one of the largest school districts in the country. Sadly, I know that there are probably many more students like them within the system and throughout the country. I feel very sad, overwhelmed and extremely depressed some days. I have to remember my “locus of control.” However, when it comes to my students, I feel a need and a desire to help them succeed. The inability to control particular facets of my day completely stresses me out. I feel that the school is doing nothing to support me in this regard despite my requests for home visits and assistance.

“Sometimes I feel like The Great Houdini. Suspended over the crowd in a strait jacket...knowing what needs to be done in order to make his task successful...bound and wiggling back and forth trying to find my way to the key. Hopefully my rope won't break before I manage to find the key and a solution.” (Teacher Journal dated 11-14-2014)

I know that there are many factors within my day and within the entire educational system that are completely out of my control. But I also need to remember that there are things that **I can** control. There are things that I can do to empower myself and my students, and not allow myself to feel like a victim controlled by a broken system. Conducting action research in my classroom was an empowering step. From my data I conclude that explicit instruction using the sight words improves reading fluency and ultimately effects independent reading comprehension. My analysis of the beginning of the year and the end of the year reading fluency and comprehension data shows that 19 out of 30 students are now reading at a 3rd grade proficiency level which is more than 50% of the students in my 2nd grade class. I attribute this to the emphasis placed on

the daily and explicit implementation of a program that directly teaches students to memorize high frequency sight words.

I believe that schools need to consider their priorities. After analyzing my data I was left wondering.

“Is it more important that my students can read a specified number of words per minute or is it more important that they comprehend what they read? I believe that comprehension is more important, and that understanding text and being able to analyze it seems far more significant to their future academic success.” (Teacher Journal dated 5-10-2014)

A deeper analysis of my reading comprehension data shows that 23 out of 30 students made gains in independent reading comprehension. Based on DIBELS reading comprehension data, 13 of the 23 students have an independent reading comprehension at or above a 3rd grade proficiency level. The increase in reading fluency allowed my students to read text in a more fluid and efficient manner, and allowed them to focus on the text rather than decoding words. I understand the value of fluency and its importance within the classroom, and clearly my research supports the benefits. Sure, students should not be allowed to take an entire day to read a passage and complete a comprehension assessment. However, the ability to dissect and analyze text is far more useful throughout life. As an adult reading a contract does really it matter how many words you can read in a minute or is it more important that you can read and understand the details within the contract? I found a great emphasis within our CPS network to improve reading fluency without anyone explaining why this should be done. Perhaps action research should be

suggested to the people within the district that continually make mandates without providing the reasoning and rationale behind it. They might learn something themselves.

Policy Implications/Recommendations:

Based upon my research I am making the following recommendations:

1. Teachers in grades K-3 should intentionally teach high frequency sight words to students.
2. Teachers in grades K-3 will dedicate at least 5 minutes each day to review high frequency sight words as a whole group. An additional 5 minutes will be dedicated to each student that is struggling with recalling sight words daily. (These groups can be led by individual students or students can work in pairs).
3. I will provide a professional development for K-3 teachers. I will explain the benefit of explicitly teaching sight words to students, and share activities and resources with colleagues so that they can implement the program within their classroom.
4. Teachers in grades K-3 need to participate in additional professional development opportunities within their district and/or state to learn strategies and interventions that would assist students and help them improve reading fluency and comprehension.
5. Teachers in grades K-3 will create a leveled library using the Fountas and Pinnell leveling system within their classroom to support the various reading abilities of students by the end of the first quarter.

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Appendix A:

For activities, resources, and useful ideas on how to teach sight words visit:

<http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/top-teaching/2012/10/tips-teaching-high-frequency-and-sight-words>

<http://www.readingresource.net/sightwords.html>

<http://blog.maketaketeach.com/teaching-sight-words/#>

Appendix B:



Sight Word Detective

Title: _____

Author: _____

Illustrator: _____

The sight word I found is...	Can be found on page...	Is from week...
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		
10.		
11.		
12.		
13.		