Evaluating Phonics Games for Authentic Literacy Experiences

Kathryn Cardella

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Evaluating Phonics Games for Authentic Literacy Experiences

by

Kathryn Cardella

December 2013

A thesis submitted to the Department of Education and Human Development of the State University of New York at Brockport in partial fulfillment for the degree of Master in Science in Education
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Chapter One: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

A hum of excitement and familiarity swept through the classroom as my twenty 1st graders “checked-in” with their Daily Five choices. The Bear and Fox groups knew they would be meeting with an adult (myself or the para-professional, Mrs. McCracken*) (*all names are pseudonyms) for guided reading. The Frog and Owl groups had made their decisions of whether to work on writing, read to self, read to someone, complete word work, or listen to reading. As each group got settled about the room, I settled at my own desk to begin working with the Bear group.

“Should we take out the book we read yesterday, Miss Cardella?” Chase eagerly asked as he began unpacking his mini-book bag. The students in my class were used to the routine of guided reading. Before introducing a new book, students reread a book from the previous day, and I selected one or two students to complete a running record with. Sometimes, I just listen to them read and take anecdotal notes. Today was one of those days.

“Sure, Chase! How about we read together?” As I took out my binder to begin making notes, Chase opened up the previous day’s text, Maria’s Pumpkin.

“Maria m-m-mad pumpkin pie,” Chase read.

“Hmm…let’s pause. [framing the word ‘made’] What do you notice about this word? Think back to yesterday’s lesson on silent-e and the game we played with that rule.” Chase paused for a moment and looked up at me. He clearly did not remember the phonics game we played yesterday, which taught the idea that a silent e makes the vowel say its name.

“Well I see an -e on the end but don’t remember the rule.”
I took out a pencil and pad of paper and wrote the word *made*. Then I circled the –e and
drew a connecting arrow above the letter *a*.

“See Chase? The silent –e on the end of the word helps the vowel say its name. What
sound does *a* say when he says his name?” Chase hesitated then said the long vowel *a* sound.
“Good! Now try stretching out that word now that we remember the rule.”

“M-a-d-e. Made! Maria made pumpkin pie!”

Although Chase eventually decoded the word, it was concerning that the entire morning
of the day prior was spent on the rule for silent e. Not only were students exposed to a mini-
lesson describing the rule, yet we practiced as a class brainstorming words, followed by practice
completing word sorts with picture and word cards. Phonics games are a routine part of the first
grade curriculum, yet the transfer of knowledge from the games and authentic reading and
writing experiences should be prevalent. As authors Yopp and Yopp (2000) state, “phonemic
awareness activities will not be helpful unless they can be placed in a context of real reading and
writing” (p. 132). This assertion holds true for phonics activities and instruction also. Unless
Chase, and the other 19 students in my class, can internalize the sounds and sequence that
phonemes make during real reading and real writing, then the purpose behind phonics games is
irrelevant.

**Significance of the Problem**

I believe that teaching phonics is an essential practice in elementary classrooms –
especially throughout Kindergarten and the 1st grade. Students must have a solid foundation of
the way consonants and vowels work together to form words. Authors Pinnell and Fountas
(2003) argue the importance of phonics instruction as children learn the complex process of
reading and writing, when they state “writing, letters, sounds, and words are keys to help children grasp and use language as a tool” (p. 1). As emergent readers and writers begin to navigate through concepts of print, identify letter names and sounds, and notice sight words, they must also begin to recognize the way letters work together to form words. Teaching phonics must be purposeful and reinforced in a variety of ways. Phonics instruction does not have to be boring – it should not teach rules, use worksheets, or take up an extended period of time (Stahl, Duffy-Hester, & Stahl, 1998).

In my classroom, phonics instruction often takes place in the form of phonics-based word games after an in-depth mini-lesson. However, there often appears to be a disconnect between the concepts taught in the mini-lessons and games, and what takes place during authentic reading and writing. Do the phonics games taught within the classroom offer opportunities for children to apply learned skills in reading and writing, or do they only teach decontextualized, isolated skills? Students like Chase are neither remembering nor applying learned concepts in their own reading experiences. Discovering which games best teach specific concepts and support a transfer of knowledge will be beneficial in creating proficient readers and writers.

**Purpose of the Study**

In this study, I analyzed specific phonics games played in the classroom in order to determine which games (if any) aid in building successful literacy skills. In my school district, specifically at my grade level, the teaching of phonics is part of the curriculum and will always be my responsibility as an educator; however, the ways in which I teach specific word patterns, sounds, and more, is flexible. Although there are varying thoughts as to when phonics instruction should take place in a child’s schooling, the majority of research indicates that first
grade is an appropriate time for students to develop basic word knowledge. Students are beginning to learn how to read and write in the first grade, and a strong knowledge of letter-sound relationships is key to literacy development. For example, Pikulski and Chard (2005) indicate that building graphophonemic foundations for fluency, including phonological awareness, letter familiarity, and phonics knowledge, is an essential part to a successful balanced literacy program. Similarly, Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, and Johnson (2008) support this foundation for literacy by indicating that letter-sound correspondence, phonics, spelling patterns, and other attributes are the core of written word knowledge. While word study through phonics is one aspect of a balanced literacy program, it certainly does not paint a full picture without guided, shared, and independent reading and writing. Through a balanced literacy program, students are taught fluency, comprehension, and decoding skills all while engaged in meaningful reading and writing of text. Pinnell and Fountas (2003) have structured the *Phonics Bundle – Grade 1* to also reflect a notion of balanced literacy, including these key components of reading. The phonics instruction within Pinnell and Fountas’ program enhances, but does not take the place of, experiences with texts.

In order for students to become proficient readers and writers, one must create an environment that reflects balanced literacy. Aside from key phonics skills being taught, there are two other cueing systems used to read proficiently. Students must learn to attend to meaning and structural cues; however, said cues work together *with* the graphophonemic cue system, which contains aspects of phonics instruction (sounds and symbols, beginnings, endings, etc.). Students must become flexible readers and decode words using all three cues. They must solve words “on the run” while making meaning and communicating through writing (Pinnell & Fountas 2003). If one were to rely solely on the graphophonemic cue system, s/he would never
comprehend or make meaning out of the text. This is why it is vital to incorporate authentic reading/writing experiences that promote the use of other cues when teaching phonics.

Because of the strong research supporting phonics instruction as part of the foundation to literacies (e.g., Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnson, 2008; Pikulski & Chard, 2005; Pinnell & Fountas, 2003; Stahl, Duffy-Hester, & Stahl, 1998; Yopp & Yopp, 2000) I explored the best practice behind purposeful phonics instruction. In addition to explicit teaching, the use of word-based games appears to be an engaging and fun way for children to acquire knowledge of letter-sound correspondence and word building. Many of the games are constructed like board games, card games, and other activities with movable pieces. Games are considered a form of play, and several theories support the teaching of phonics through games as a basis of literacy learning. Authors Morrow and Rand (1991) encourage literacy based play by stating, “Play is an ideal setting which allows the young child to practice, elaborate, and extend emergent literacy abilities” (p. 397). Nicolopoulou (2010) continues this notion when conveying the importance the role of playful learning has in a high-quality education.

Teaching phonics through play-based word games may be a beneficial route of instruction; however, not all games are created equal. Many of the games played in my classroom appear to support students’ use of phonics skills on the spot, yet when students are engaged in authentic reading and writing, a transfer of knowledge seems to be lost. Through my study, I sought to answer the following research questions:

What kinds of learning opportunities are inherent in phonics games from the Pinnell and Fountas Phonics Bundle – Grade 1? How might the phonics games support students during authentic reading and writing activities?
By looking through a sharper lens during phonics instruction, and when playing phonics games with my class, I analyzed the games for the affordances they offer for students to learn and use phonics in their authentic reading. I looked for both positive and negative aspects of the games. I also observed students during real reading and writing activities in order to witness a transfer (or lack thereof) of phonics knowledge while reading/writing.

**Study Approach**

This research study followed a qualitative approach through active teacher-research, as I am the classroom teacher for the study participants. The study took place in an elementary school in an affluent suburb of a mid-size city in western New York. It took place in a first grade classroom. I had been working with the first grade student participants since September 2012. The participants came from varying backgrounds. While some of the students attended Kindergarten at the same elementary school, others attended private, full-day programs.

I conducted the study as five students of varying backgrounds, abilities, and skill levels worked together in a small group with me. My station was one of four literacy stations that the group rotated through. As the group that I studied worked with me, the other 15 students were at the other three stations. Each of the students was familiar with small-group rotations, as we frequently completed them as a class. The way the students were grouped was flexible and changed frequently. Sometimes, I grouped students according to ability level or need, while other times I mixed up the groups so that students could learn from one another and connect on differing levels. It is important to stress that the students in the small group were not necessarily in the same guided reading group just because they were in the same literacy station group. The point of this study was to evaluate the affordance phonics games provide as possible methods of
learning key literacy skills that will transfer into authentic reading and writing experiences. A mixed-ability group is an ideal group to study because the games can be scaffolded for any student and should support phonics learning regardless of current reading levels or ability.

I conducted this study by choosing five phonics games to analyze. I first taught a mini-lesson on whatever skill the game reinforced (i.e. long vowel sounds, adding –ing to the end of a word, or rhyming words) and then taught the students how to play the game. Because I was expecting students to transfer the knowledge into real reading and writing experiences, I presented examples in real context. For instance, during a mini-lesson on contractions, students read “I’m a Little Teapot” and circled the contractions, while expanding them in the margins.

Sometimes, the game required the teacher to play, but other games allow me to sit back and watch the students interact with one another. Over the course of six weeks, I recorded conversations through anecdotal notes. I prompted students when needed and noted how students responded and reacted to the games. Throughout the study, I assessed the same students in their guided reading groups through conversations, anecdotal notes, and running records. I specifically looked for transfer of knowledge from the phonics game played (i.e. if the skill focused on silent e, I would hope to see fewer miscues when children read words like cake or make). If the majority of students in my small group were noting and using the skills taught during phonics instruction, I assumed that the phonics games are of good quality and fall under ‘best practice.’ I collected data through taking fieldnotes of observations, interviewing students, collecting writing samples, and analyzing running records.
Rationale

I chose to analyze phonics games as a means to support literacy development and create lifelong readers and writers because there is little research regarding the effect word-based games have on real reading and writing. Even though Wolfgang and Sanders (2001) support the notion that play-oriented curriculum emphasizes “child-directed representations of the symbolic through activities in which constructive materials, imaginative sequences, and/or other elements of language are frequently used” (p. 177), in combination with Picket’s (2005) notion that play offers opportunities for instruction, modeling, and demonstrating literacy skills, there are few links that connect play-based literacy with phonics as a foundation for reading and writing.

After working with my class of first grade students since the beginning of the school year, I knew how excited they got when introduced to a new game. Many of the reinforcing activities used throughout the 1st grade curriculum (during math, science, and beyond the scope of literacy) are forms of games. Students respond positively and often beg to have the directions, cards, or game boards sent home in order to play with mom and dad. There was no doubt that implementing more phonics games, or new phonics games, would be a hit with the small group of students I worked with.

Another reason behind implementing my study within small group rotations was due to the ease of application. The shift from classroom teacher to teaching with an eye of a researcher was seamless due to students already feeling comfortable and used to the routine of literacy centers and phonics games. As already described, the group who was chosen was working at varying levels of reading and writing ability. The students chosen to participate were chosen to best represent a wide range of learners in my classroom, which hopefully helped determine which phonics games (if any) were most successful in reaching students universally.
Summary

As I navigated through my first full year of teaching, I encountered several challenges and bumps in the road; however, the more I reflected and used “teacher instinct” to help my students succeed, the more rewarding each experience became. Curiosity and wondering are a part of my educational philosophy, and the pressing questions revolving around phonics games as a tool to learning key literacy skills are too relevant to ignore. Although play can take various forms in the classroom, the use of play as a means to learn is one that has been significantly researched and supported as a beneficial route of instruction (Edwards & Cutter-Mackenzie, 2011; Nicolopoulou, 2010; Wolfgang & Sanders, 2001). I think it is both important and purposeful to analyze the phonics games used in the first grade in order to determine which games are successful at aiding students in real reading and writing practices. The information gathered from this study can assist my own instructional practices, as well as those of my colleagues.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

As educators continue to navigate best practice in teaching literacies, I delved into one specific aspect of a literacy program: phonics instruction. In order to place into context my research, I have reviewed and synthesized literature related to definitions of phonics, phonemic awareness, and phonological awareness, balanced literacy, decontextualized phonics instruction versus a balanced literacy approach, quality phonics instruction, and play/games as a route to literacy. Each section contains key information that assists in placing phonics instruction in a larger context of a quality literacy program.

Defining Phonics, Phonemic Awareness, and Phonological Awareness

Before one can analyze phonics games as significant methods of phonics instruction, one must define three key terms in regards to building such foundational skills: phonics, phonemic awareness and phonological awareness. All three are vital aspects of literacy development, and work together to grow proficient readers and writers. Educators often confuse the terms, interchanging one for another, or using other terms completely (Yopp & Yopp, 2000). In the following section, I will define each term as it applies to literacy instruction.

Phonics

Phonics is the most important term when discussing this study, as this is what will be assessed and analyzed through the use of Pinnell and Fountas (2003) phonics games. Stahl (1992) defines phonics as “an orthographic code of language and the relationships of spelling patterns to sound patterns” (p. 618). This broad definition leaves educators free to choose which methods of instruction will best suit the needs of their classes. The overall understanding of phonics instruction is that it is the teaching of the alphabetic principle – which assumes that for each
speech sound or phoneme in an alphabetic writing system, there is a specific graphic representation in the form of alphabet letters or groups of letters (Chapman, 2003).

Phonics instruction can also be looked at in two differing lights: analytic and synthetic. According to Comaskey, Savage, and Abrami (2009), “most literacy researchers have assumed that the synthetic and analytic phonics teaching leads to qualitatively different ways of reading” (p. 94). Comaskey, et al. (2009) and Johnston, McGeown, and Watson (2012) suggest that synthetic phonics instruction yields better results than analytic regarding emergent literacy development. In Comaskey, et al.’s article (2009), the qualities of both analytic and synthetic phonics instruction are discussed. When one considers blending graphemes and phonemes, one may assume that it is the result of synthetic phonics instruction. Johnston, et al. (2012) describes a commonality amongst synthetic phonics programs when stating, “blending is introduced at the beginning of reading…where the child sounds and blends the letters in unknown printed words” (p.1370-1371). On the other hand, if one considers the use of onsets and rimes, as well as initially learning phonological awareness, when learning to read, one may assume that it is the result of analytic phonics instruction (Comaskey, et al., 2009, & Johnston, et al., 2012).

In a study conducted by Johnston, et al. (2012), students who were taught with either an analytic or synthetic phonics approach were compared to see which group was more successful in word reading, spelling and reading comprehension. A comparison of regular and irregular word reading was also analyzed. Results suggested that students taught with a synthetic approach had an overall better understanding of word reading, spelling, and reading comprehension. When looking at the data regarding the reading of regular and irregular words, the study indicated that there was not one better instructional method over another – specifically, the synthetic approach did not impede the learners’ abilities to read regular/irregular words.
Phonemic Awareness

Phonemic awareness is part of a larger idea (phonological awareness – which will be discussed in the next section) and refers to the ability to detect each phoneme in words (Chapman, 2003). A phoneme is the smallest unit of speech sounds that impact communication (Chapman, 2003; Yopp & Yopp, 2000). Comparably, Chappell et al. (2009) define phonemic awareness as the cognizance of phonemes in order to understand alphabetic principal, phonics, and spelling. This is different from phonics in the sense that phonemic awareness is the awareness that the speech stream consists of a sequence of sounds, and one should be able to mentally grab hold of said sounds, and manipulate the chunks of speech (Yopp & Yopp, 2000). Phonics instruction supports a growth of phonemic awareness, as phonemic awareness also supports the growth of phonics; however, the two are not one in the same.

Phonological Awareness

Phonological awareness is the umbrella under which other terms, such as phonemic awareness, rest. According to Yopp and Yopp (2000) phonological awareness is the sensitivity to any size unit of sound – it is the awareness of the general sound structure of language. Part of understanding phonological awareness is knowing that words both contain meaning and produce sound (Stahl, S.A., Duffy-Hester, A.M., & Stahl, K.A., 1998). Through Stahl et al.’s (1998) work, it was determined that phonological awareness could be supported by doing things as simple as reading one alphabet book per day or encouraging students to use invented spellings.

With research suggesting that teaching phonics is part of a balanced literacy program, I was able to better assess Pinnell and Fountas’ (2003) Phonics Bundle for Grade 1. I know that students must have a broad understanding of phonological awareness in order to foster development in phonemic awareness and phonics skills. Through using the Pinnell and Fountas
(2003) phonics package, I supported student sensitivity to all sounds in words, as well as the general structure of text. I chose high-quality phonics games to support growth in these areas. I chose to teach phonics within my classroom through small group, as well as whole group instruction throughout the school day, combining explicit phonics instruction with follow-up lessons in real context. Through teaching phonics, I supported my students’ phonological awareness, including phonemic awareness.

**Balanced Literacy**

While phonics instruction is a necessary part of a balanced literacy program, it is not the only component to quality literacy instruction (Johnson, Dunbar, & Roach, 2003; Ko, 2007; Pinnell & Fountas, 2003; Strech, 1995; Willows, 2008). A balanced literacy program pays equal attention to both reading and writing, and develops skills to foster both domains (Ko, 2007). In my classroom, this took place during our English Language Arts block. My students were well versed in the routine of *The Daily Five* (Boushey & Moser, 2006) and were aware of the importance of each of the rotations to their literacy development. While *The Daily Five* is simply a management tool, the rotations help to support and sustain a balanced literacy program. Students choose read to self, read to someone, word work, work on writing, or listen to reading while the teacher teaches guided reading groups during the allotted time (Boushey & Moser, 2006).

Various research suggests slightly different views on what components are most essential to a balanced literacy program; however, the following attributes are common amongst research: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluent automatic reading of the text, vocabulary development, text comprehension strategies, spelling and handwriting, written composition strategies, as well as
on-going assessment (Chappell, et. al, 2009; Pikulski & Chard, 2005; Pinnell & Fountas, 2003; Willows, 2008). During the Daily Five, students may be practicing spelling and handwriting during word work, or written composition strategies during work on writing. Each of the essential components of a balanced literacy approach – as determined by research of Pikulski and Chard, 2005; Pinnell and Fountas, 2003; and Willows, 2008 – were represented in one form or another during guided reading and/or a Daily Five rotation in my classroom.

That being said, there are numerous stances regarding how phonics instruction should be taught, and for how long, within a balanced literacy approach. Authors Kosanovich and Verhagen (2012) suggest that foundational reading skills can be fostered and built upon at any age. On the other hand, Stahl, et. al (1998) and Dahl and Scharer (2000) suggest that phonics instruction should depend on the child, how much background knowledge s/he has, and if s/he has a history of reading problems. In my classroom, phonics instruction was essential to the growth of a first-grade reader/writer due to fostering the basic knowledge of the alphabetic principle and how letters work together to form sounds and words. Phonics instruction took place within The Daily Five but also within small group instruction.

An on-going debate surrounding phonics instruction relates to how old one should be when first learning skills, along with how long should one be exposed to phonics instruction. In a study conducted by Cunningham and Carroll (2011), two groups of children were observed and analyzed for differences/commonalities in literacy development based on age. Evidence suggests that “children taught to read later in childhood (age 6-7) make faster progress in early literacy than those taught at a younger age (age 4-5)” (Cunningham & Carroll, 2011, pg. 475). Cunningham and Carroll (2011) used this background when creating a control group of standard-educated children (age 4-5) and a Steiner-educated group (age 7-9) to test their theory. The
standard-educated children were children who were taught in a traditional sequence (teaching foundational reading skills from an early, emergent age on). In looking at phonics-related development, initially, the older, “Steiner children showed better early deletion and blending skills; however, by the end of the first year, the standard-educated children showed similar scores” (Cunningham & Carroll, 2011, p.485). As the study continued, it appeared that the younger children made better progress than the older children. Cunningham and Carroll (2011) suggest that this is due to the way phonics was taught to the standard-educated children. Their notion suggests that the “quality and quantity of phonics instruction was higher than that of the Steiner group” (Cunningham and Carroll, 2011, p. 486). The major differences between the Steiner group and the standard group included: 1) The Steiner participants received less phonics instruction possibly due to the superior-reading skills of the children and 2) The Steiner group was taught using an analytic approach to phonics instruction while the standard-group was taught using a synthetic approach (Cunningham & Carroll, 2011). Cunningham and Carroll (2011) suggested, “a positive age effect was ‘cancelled out’ by exposure to more frequent and higher quality (synthetic as opposed to analytic) phonics instruction” (p. 487). Regardless of differing opinions on how long phonics instruction should take place and at what age, one notion that most educators agree on is that phonics instruction is a key element to a balanced literacy program (Stahl et al., 1998)

**Decontextualized Phonics Instruction vs. Balanced Literacy**

In this section, I will present a long-standing argument on two different schools of thought regarding teaching phonics: a decontextualized, systematic approach versus embedding it in a balanced literacy program. Research indicates that educators have had numerous battles
on whether teaching foundational skills in isolation based on letter sounds and phonetic pairings is better than having students decode words in context using a whole language approach (Brooks & Brooks, 2005; Dahl & Scharer, 2000; Goral, 2001; Manning & Kamii, 2000; Moustafa, 1997; Taylor, 1997; Wilde, 1997). While the argument still exists in some areas of education, research suggests that there may be a solution by combining both methods in a balanced approach (Brooks & Brooks, 2005; Moustafa, 1997; Raven, 1997; Taylor, 1997; Wilde, 1997).

As Brooks and Brooks (2005) indicate, phonics instruction as a component of learning to read encourages students to learn that language is ordered and sequential – with a strong emphasis on the relationship between phonemes and graphemes. Students who learn through phonics instruction acquire a sense of phonemic awareness (Brooks & Brooks, 2005). The phonics games being analyzed within my own classroom were carefully looked at in order to see if the skills taught fall under a systematic, organized approach as mentioned.

Typically, educators teach phonics through the context of real reading and writing. According to Taylor (1997), “Whole language is a child centered, literature based approach to language teaching that will immerse the students in real communication” (p.2). Whole language encourages students to decode words within context – using semantic (meaning), syntactic (structure), and graphophonic (visual) cues as guides. This approach immerses students in authentic reading and writing experiences and teaches basic skills through skillfully planned, teachable moments as they occur in context (Manning & Kamii, 2000; Taylor, 1997). According to Wilde (1997), the role of phonics is minimal in this process – not directly taught using “rules,” yet induced through real reading and learning of new words. Though much of a readers’ knowledge about words and phonics emerges through reading, Wilde (1997) states that it still makes sense to include a limited amount of a more formal instruction, in a way that works
inductively from what children already know. This combined approach to phonics instruction is further supported by work from Manning and Kamii (2000) when they delved into balanced literacy versus decontextualized phonics instruction.

A study conducted by Manning and Kamii (2000) shows the impact of whole language versus systematic phonics instruction after they selected thirty-eight kindergarteners who were individually interviewed after receiving either phonics instruction in isolated segments, or phonics instruction in context (whole language approach). Research indicated that a whole language approach produced students who had made more progress in reading/writing development than those who were taught with systematic phonics instruction (Manning & Kamii, 2000). In my classroom, this occurred daily, as I exposed students to various reading strategies during read aloud, shared reading, and guided reading experiences. I also noted important skills such as vowel patterns, letter sounds, and more during writer’s workshop, small group work, and during other parts of the school day.

However, the way my own classroom was run does not fall under either explicit, decontextualized phonics instruction nor a whole language approach – I taught reading through a combination of both approaches, depending on what students were lacking or struggling with at the time. This method of instruction is supported by research from Morrow and Tracey, 1997; Raven, 1997; and Taylor, 1997. This equalized approach directly links to an entire balanced literacy program as mentioned in the previous section. I taught phonics in a systematic, intentional way during small group work; however, I also included phonics skills throughout the school day with context-driven lessons (Willows, 2008). Students learn best from an educator who is in-tune with what they need, and from an educator who knows how to best deliver it
(Taylor, 1997). In the next section, I will describe what types of activities and approaches are considered quality forms of phonics instruction within a balanced literacy approach.

**Quality Phonics Instruction**

Because educators can dictate how phonics is taught in the classroom, it is vital to look at what constitutes quality phonics instruction. Part of my own research includes an instructional phonics game rubric based on the work of Pinnell and Fountas (2003), Morrow and Tracey (1997), Kowalyk and Deacon (2007), and Stahl (1992). This rubric helped me assess how effective the *Pinnell and Fountas Phonics Bundle for Grade 1* games are for literacy development. Aside from analyzing one *method* of teaching phonics (through games), educators have grappled with phonics instruction as a whole as they try to navigate the best approaches. In the following sections, I will discuss general instructional methods for teaching phonics – some of the methods have been deemed high quality, while others are simply suggestions for teaching foundational reading and writing skills through phonics.

**General Instruction**

In a study conducted by Morrow and Tracey (1997), several college students enrolled in a teacher education program observed and recorded various approaches to phonics instruction in several classrooms. The classrooms were located in schools serving students of assorted socioeconomic levels, with mixed races and ethnicities. The observers spent time taking careful notes of what went on during phonics instruction – looking for dialogue, materials used, and actual instruction. Morrow and Tracey (1997) reflected upon the collected data and determined that phonics instruction occurred in three different ways: through *explicit instruction, contextual
instruction, or a combined approach. The explicit instruction refers to the systematic, sequential progression of phonics skills in an isolated manner (Brooks & Brooks, 2005; Morrow & Tracey, 1997). Contextual instruction refers to learning within meaningful or functional contexts (i.e. morning message, story book reading, language experience charts, etc.) (Manning & Kamii, 2000; Morrow & Tracey, 1997). Finally, a combined approach refers to phonics instruction in which both explicit and contextual approaches are used (Morrow & Tracey, 1997; Willows, 2008).

With that being said, Stahl (1992), has identified nine guidelines to high quality phonics instruction as follows:

1) Build’s on a child’s rich concepts about how print functions; 2) Builds on a foundation of phonemic awareness; 3) Is clear and direct; 4) Is integrated into a total reading program; 5) Focuses on reading words, not learning rules; 6) May include onsets and rimes; 7) May include invented spelling practice; 8) Develops independent word recognition strategies, focusing attention on the internal structure of words; and 9) Develops automatic word recognition skills so that students can devote their attention to comprehension, not words (pgs. 620-624).

While this list is certainly not exhaustive, Stahl (1992) clearly indicates a need to teach phonics through authentic reading and writing experiences, while also leaving room to teach skills directly. Any form of phonics instruction should take place within the context of a balanced literacy program.

Part of meaningful planning behind phonics instruction should support the learning of onsets and rimes, or the natural parts of an English syllable (Brooks, 2011; Moustafa, 1997). According to Moustafa (1997), children are able to manipulate onsets and rimes without being
taught to do so; however, because English is the only language that has both onsets and rimes, it should be explicitly taught to English Language Learners. Using onset and rime knowledge can assist one in decoding words through meaningful engagement in text. Students are capable of using letter-onset and letter-rime correspondence to decode written words, rather than memorizing letter-phoneme rules taught. This process is spontaneous and natural – it allows students to read and write words that have the same letter sequences (Moustafa, 1997).

Elements of the research that both Stahl (1992) and Moustafa (1997) produced can be supported with work from Mesmer and Griffith (2005) in their study of explicit, systematic phonics instruction. Mesmer and Griffith (2005) surveyed International Reading Association members who were also primary (K-3) teachers using a questionnaire. Educators were asked to rank methods of teaching phonics (the six seemingly most popular methods: songs, word sorts, making words, scripted teacher directions, worksheets, and games) as highly, somewhat, or not at all explicit and systematic in method. Participants were also given the option of saying they were unsure. The results yielded an overwhelming population of teachers who prefer phonics instruction that is not incidental, yet explicit (Mesmer & Griffith, 2005). While the results only indicate educators’ preferred methods of instruction, explicit instruction, as preferred by the teacher participants in Mesmer and Griffith’s (2005) study, correlates with Stahl’s (1992) notion of teaching phonics in a clear and concise manner.

Mesmer and Griffith (2005) noticed that educators identified word sort activities as highly explicit and systematic. In thinking about the terms “explicit” and “systematic,” one perceives both as teacher-driven models of instruction, not teacher-student collaboration; however, Mesmer and Griffith (2005) found educators considered word sorts as a quality, yet
explicitly labeled, method of phonics instruction. Although the findings of Mesmer and Griffith’s (2005) study were initially surprising, the conclusion is that:

Explicit, systematic phonics instruction is instruction matched to students’ developmental levels. It incorporates a scope and sequence for content delivery and a variety of word study activities. Such instruction promotes student engagement and accountability through direct teaching (p. 374).

Several different approaches to phonics instruction can be deemed quality, regardless of their monikers.

**Play and Games as a Route to Literacy Learning**

While it is clear that phonics instruction is an integral aspect of literacy development (Johnson, Dunbar, & Roach, 2003; Ko, 2007; Pinnell & Fountas, 2003; Strech, 1995; Willows, 2008), and instruction can range from explicit (Brooks & Brooks, 2005; Morrow & Tracey, 1997), to contextual (Manning & Kamii, 2000; Morrow & Tracey, 1997), or combined (Morrow & Tracey, 1997; Willows, 2008), educators can be creative with what manipulatives, tools, or other techniques they uses to teach phonics. An ever-growing trend in classroom education has revolved around the notion of play and games as a route to literacy learning (Pickett, 2005). In this section, I will review some of the research developed in the last decade regarding the use of play and games as a method of instruction. This directly relates to my own research questions concerning the quality and effectiveness of phonics games in a first grade classroom.

Research indicates that fostered in meaningful ways, play facilitates literacy acquisition, allows young children to practice and apply literacy skills, and promotes cognitive development crucial to learning to read and write (Pickett, 2005). In Pickett’s (2005) study of her first grade
classroom, she observed, documented, and reflected upon how student and teacher negotiated play-based activities influenced literacy development. Pickett (2005) noted that as children navigated through literacy blocks that included materials like magazines, books, newspapers, a listening center, dramatic play, puzzles, and more, students were engaged and were having fun. They also developed literacy identities – negotiating the materials at their own developmental stages, partook in social interactions and applied learning through practice (Pickett, 2005).

Liu (2008) reports “learning through structured and spontaneous play is the springboard into the curriculum” (Cox & Sanders, 1994, p. 167 as cited in Liu, 2008, p. 20). Liu (2008) continues to suggest, “Play takes an important role in children’s learning and development as it gives learners intrinsic motivation, and personally relevant, meaningful experiences” (p. 20). Play also allows children to develop in all domains – physical, social, emotional, and cognitive (Liu, 2008). Liu (2008) supports play in the context of gaming with rules (i.e. phonics games) when she states that, “engaging in games with rules develops children’s logical thinking and social controls and enables them to understand order in the world” (p. 32). Several of the Pinnell and Fountas (2003) phonics games support a socio-cultural theory of literacy in which “literacy is defined not just as the multifaceted act of reading, writing, and thinking, but as constructing meaning from printed text within a sociocultural context” (Perez & McCarty, 2004, p. 4, as cited in Liu, 2008, p. 36).

The research presented by both Pickett (2005) and Liu (2008) addresses an important aspect to any learning – motivation. While it is ideal for all students to be motivated, two groups of children in particular come to mind when thinking about best practice: young readers and writers and students with learning disabilities. When discussing literacy development, motivation can especially be a critical factor in students with learning disabilities (Kowalyk &
Deacon, 2007). It is imperative that students with special needs are given the same opportunities to learn as their peers, and often times, it is a matter of motivation that acts as a leading factor in their success. Kowalyk and Deacon (2007) suggest educational games, specifically those targeted at phonological awareness in the early years, can strengthen much-needed skills for at-risk readers while still allowing the entire class to participate and reinforce skills with interest and motivation.

Similarly, Ajibade and Ndububa (2008) conducted research on the effect of word games, songs, and stories in motivating English Language students to learn the English language. Conducted with students from Nigeria, activities using charts, art projects, drama, riddles, songs, stories, and games, were found to help motivate students with positive learning results (Ajibade & Ndububa, 2008). In looking directly at the word-games used throughout the study, Ajibade and Ndububa (2008) indicate that games involving competition and those organized by rules were deemed most enjoyable due to the collaborative nature and successful learning responses. Through well-planned games, Ajibade and Ndububa (2008) state that, “learners can practice and internalize vocabulary, grammar, and structures extensively” (p. 31). Likewise, Boucher (1994) suggests that phonics games are one way to hold students’ attention while still focusing attention on phonemic structure of words.

While there is a gap in research indicating how phonics games might support literacy learning, research has indicated that the use of games in the classroom is beneficial for student learning. As Wernbacher, Pfeiffer, Wagner, and Hofstätter (2012) convey, games can bring about a lifelike experience to learning that cannot be replicated elsewhere. The learning process is natural and occurs unnoticed when one is engaged in a purposeful game. This theory holds true in my classroom, as students often requested to play certain phonics games (that we have
played during our ELA block) as a free choice option on Friday afternoons. While some may realize all of the great learning happening, most of the students simply wanted to engage in a game.

Studies show that phonics instruction through games not only promotes positive learning experiences through motivation and interest, but also fosters reading and writing development in young children (Ajibade & Ndububa, 2008; Boucher, 1994; Kowalyk & Deacon, 2007; Pickett, 2005). In my classroom, phonics instruction was taught in a combined approach (Morrow & Tracey, 1997; Willows, 2008) using Pinnell and Fountas (2003) phonics games as one route to student literacy development. While games are one way to support learning of the alphabetic principle, it is important to note that note all games are created equal, and should be analyzed (as I did with the Pinnell and Fountas games) prior to implementing.

Summary

In order to best support my own research in the field of phonics instruction, I have read, reviewed, and synthesized relevant information surrounding said topic. By taking a closer look at what a balanced literacy program is through work of Ko (2007), Pinnell and Fountas (2003), and others, one can better understand how phonics instruction fits into a complete literacy program. It was also vital to note the unique differences amongst the terms: phonics, phonemic awareness, and phonological awareness (Yopp & Yopp, 2000) before considering what effective phonics instruction looks like (Stahl, 1992). Finally, it was central to discuss how play and games support literacies, as I analyzed phonics games as quality measures of reading and writing development.
Chapter Three: Study Design

The main purpose behind this study was to take a closer look at possible learning opportunities inherent in phonics games – specifically at the first grade level. Analyzing the phonics games helped to find which games provided authentic learning experiences that transferred into real reading and writing activities, rather than offering a decontextualized version of the skill.

Research Questions

What kinds of learning opportunities are inherent in phonics games from the Pinnell and Fountas Phonics Bundle – Grade 1? How might the phonics games support students during authentic reading and writing activities?

Participants

The participants for this study attended an elementary school located in an affluent suburb of a mid-size city in western New York. The elementary school serves families from all socio-economic backgrounds and ethnicities (Retrieved from school website). The students taking part in the study were from my own classroom, which was one out of three first grade classrooms located in the school. My class had twenty students, 11 boys and 9 girls. The class possessed a wide-range of ethnicities and races, ranging from Asian, Indian, South American, and Caucasian. One student was identified as an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) learner due to his family speaking Chinese at home. Several students within the class were in the process of either being coded or supported by other building professionals through Tier Two interventions. One of the students was assessed for Asperger’s Syndrome, while
another was observed for processing delays. Another student may have had Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder; however, both the parents and I held off on further action due to it not interfering with his academics. Finally, one student had extreme socio-emotional issues and sought guidance from the social worker at least once a week.

I chose five individual students to participate in the study. Students had been working with their table groups during small group phonics instruction. I chose one out of the four tables as the group of five students to participate. I did this by writing the numbers one through four on separate sheets of paper, folding them up, and picking one piece out of a hat. In planning table groups, I tried to include students with varying needs, abilities, background knowledge, and familiarity with one another. In thinking about my students with varying needs, the use of phonics games as a route to literacy is one that may result in higher motivation and better attitudes about applying learned skills in reading (Kowalyk & Deacon, 2007). I found that by keeping students in their table groups during phonics instruction, each can ‘bring something to the table’ when holding a discussion, sharing ideas, connections, and more. If a few students in particular were struggling, Mrs. McCracken or I pulled them at a different time during the day to clarify and reteach. Students were familiar with this routine, and initiating the study did not disrupt normal, classroom behavior.

**Context of the Study**

The five participants of this study all attended the same elementary school, located in Western New York. The school district is ranked one of the top districts in the country, state, and nation. The total district population is 33,000, across nine schools (K-12), and touching six different towns. Average class size is 21 to 24 students, while the student/teacher ratio in
elementary school is 14 to 1. The particular elementary school that this study took place in, houses students in grades Kindergarten through 5th grade. This district is one of the few in the surrounding areas that still have a half-day Kindergarten program; therefore, the current first grade students may have gone to a private, full-day program prior to entering public schooling. As a school-wide initiative, teachers are encouraged to push students to think critically, reflect throughout the day, and use higher-level questioning techniques to elicit student-driven learning (Retrieved from school website).

The study was conducted in my own, first grade classroom. There were two other sections of first grade in the building, and all of us used the *Pinnell and Fountas Phonics Bundle – Grade 1* (2003). The actual program was piloted last year; however, this was the first year paraprofessionals have had training on the bundle, as well as the first year that the grade level team delved more deeply into the mini-lessons, games, and materials that accompany the program. It is important to note that the reading benchmark assessments (Fountas & Pinnell, 2010) that the district uses are also from educators Fountas and Pinnell. This district uses a balanced literacy approach to their ELA instruction, and in keeping consistent across grade levels and schools, all students are to be familiar with Fountas and Pinnell assessments, tools, and other materials produced by the famous duo. Aligned with the district’s ELA philosophy, while important, phonics instruction should never take the place of a core reading program (Stahl, 1992). It *should* act as a foundation to building necessary skills in order to read and write in genuine situations. The way that the *Pinnell and Fountas Phonics Bundle – Grade 1* is used in the classroom certainly represents *part* of a whole, balanced literacy program.

The classroom environment was one that was welcoming, colorful, and risk-free. Primary and rainbow colors were splashed on the walls and scattered about the room. It was
literacy rich in the sense that there were purposeful posters, charts, and books on the walls and shelves. The layout is open, with a clear flow. There were four tables that seat five students each, as well as a kidney-shaped teacher table in the front and back of the room. Students also had a coatroom to place their belongings, as well as a sink area for washing hands and cleaning supplies. A whiteboard spanned the front of the room, with magnets, student work, and written directions taking up some of the space. A large, blue carpet with frogs, numbers, and letters was centered on the floor for students to gather on. An easel and “teacher chair” were also located in the front of the room.

There was also a full-time paraprofessional in the classroom who acted as a second teacher on several occasions. Throughout the day, Mrs. McCracken prepped materials for the week, worked individually with students, or took a small group when asked. The latter is essential to the study, due to Mrs. McCracken taking a small group for phonics instruction at least twice a week. While Mrs. McCracken was not a certified teacher, she did attend a professional development this year, based solely on using and teaching from the *Pinnell and Fountas Phonics Bundle – Grade 1*. Mrs. McCracken has worked with first grade students for nine years, and has worked as both a general education paraprofessional and a Committee for Special Education paraprofessional (CSE para) for over twelve years.

Students were familiar with the daily routine and looked forward to knowing the schedule of events each day. They were aware of the materials available to them in the room. Everything was organized and labeled. For example, the writing center near the door was always stocked with paper, pencils, tape, staplers, erasers, and other materials for writing. Many of these materials were used in conjunction with phonics instruction.
Phonics instruction took place as whole group, small group, or an individualized method – with small group being the most popular. When I taught small group phonics, students typically rotated through four stations, each station taking 25 minutes. Two of the stations were teacher stations (myself and Mrs. McCracken) and two of the stations were independent stations. The independent stations contained games or activities that students had already experienced at a teacher station. Students were able to practice and reinforce knowledge on phonics through small group, partner work, or individualized activities. The teacher stations began with a mini-lesson, followed by practice of the taught skill. Often times, this took the form of a game. It was at my teacher station that I analyzed the use of phonics games as a means to developing real reading and writing strategies.

When students first came to my station, I presented them with a brief overview of what they would be learning and doing during the rotation. I provided a 5-8 minute mini-lesson on the phonics skill, modeled using the skill in context (3 minutes) and then showed students how to play the phonics-based game. Students typically had at least 15 minutes to practice playing the game with one another, with a partner, or individually – depending on the game. I prompted and assisted students when needed during this time. This was not the last time students were exposed to the phonics game. This teacher station then became an independent station later in the week. Often times, students asked for the games to be available during “Friday Fun” choice time.

The phonics skill(s) taught during the teacher stations were reinforced throughout the school week during whole and small group lessons across content areas. I specifically planned guided reading lessons around the phonics skills taught, hoping to foster a transfer of knowledge from one aspect of the students’ learning to authentic reading opportunities. For example, if students learned about changing word endings during the phonics station, I pointed out the words
“can” and “cat” within the text, and held a discussion on how the two are similar and different. These small moments may have sparked students to search the rest of the text for words with similar beginnings and different endings. I collected data for this study during both the small group phonics centers, as well as during guided reading.

**Positionality as the Researcher**

As the teacher-researcher for this study, it is vital to describe my own positionality due to wanting to acknowledge any beliefs, philosophies, and more that may impact the research. I am a 25-year-old Caucasian female who lives in the same town as the participants’ school in Western New York. I graduated with honors from Niagara University in May of 2010 with a dual certification in Early Childhood (B-2) and Childhood Education (1-6). After graduating, I continued my passion for education by frequently subbing in local school districts (including the one I am currently employed by), teaching preschool at a non-profit organization, and working as an Instructional Technology Specialist in a long-term position at a neighboring elementary school. My own schooling also continues, as I work towards achieving a master’s degree in Childhood Literacy at The College at Brockport, SUNY. I am in my final year of classes.

After experience in all elementary grade levels, as well as experience working with students of varying needs, I finally secured a probationary position. This past school year was my first full-year of teaching, and the year in which I conducted this study. I taught 20 students – 11 boys and 9 girls. I also supervised one female paraprofessional in the classroom. I am now currently teaching a group of 21 fourth grade students at the same school.

As a teacher-researcher, my goal is to acknowledge my own beliefs and philosophies that encompass who I am as an educator in order to successfully plan, administer, and analyze a
meaningful study. I believe that my role as an elementary school teacher is to help shape and guide students’ development as they navigate the world around them. More specifically, as a first grade teacher, it was my belief that I could ‘make or break’ a student’s perception of school during this crucial year (Willows, 2008). Students in the first grade go through major development – physically, emotionally, and mentally. As teacher of the first grade, it was my role to motivate students to do their best, be their best, and work towards independence. I did this by determining what each student needed to succeed, planning lessons that reflected universal design for learning, and consistently used on-going formative assessment as a means to structure further teaching (Retrieved from http://www.cast.org/udl/).

I believe in real, authentic reading and writing experiences. I believe in showing children how adults use reading and writing in their everyday experiences, explaining the purpose behind everything we do, and discussing why it is meaningful (Hall & Grisham-Brown, 2011). I believe in making mistakes in front of my students to show them that we are all human. Creating a risk-free environment is one of my biggest goals as an educator. Students should feel safe to be themselves, have fun, and learn with their peers. Students respond best to positive feedback and encouragement – constantly examining what went wrong is not good for one’s ego or further success. I believe that students need to see a correct model of behavior, skill, and strategy before trying it on their own. I believe that I am one of the most significant role models in my six-year-old students’ lives, and it is my job to set an example (e.g., Cohen & Wysocky, 2005; Johnson, P., 2006; Wong, H.K. & Wong, R.T., 2009).

I decided to pursue research surrounding phonics games due to the immediate impact on my own classroom, as well as the classrooms of my colleagues. Phonics instruction played a
large role in the first grade curriculum and I continued instruction using a small group of my own students as participants in this study. I worked with them from May 2013 to June 2013.

Data Collection

I collected data through the use of a phonics game rubric, fieldnotes, writing samples, semi-structured interviews, and running records.

Phonics Game Rubric

Prior to collecting any participant data, I began analyzing five phonics games for effective phonics instruction. I created a rubric for quality phonics instruction based on the work of Pinnell and Fountas (2003), Morrow & Tracey (1997), Kowalyk & Deacon (2007), and Stahl (1992). The rubric is attached as Appendix B. I read the accompanying mini-lessons and overview of each game that is provided by Pinnell and Fountas (2003) in the Phonics Bundle text. Based on the information provided, I begin to analyze the games for effective qualities. I was not able to fully analyze each game until after the games were played with each small group. I completed the rubric for each game after I introduced, taught, and watched students play.

Fieldnotes

I observed the same small group of students as they interacted with each other while playing the phonics games. By taking careful notes in a double-sided journal, I witnessed if playing the games helped students transfer the taught skills. Some of the behaviors I observed included student motivation (i.e. Were students actively engaged in the game? Did they appear to be having fun? Were students leading discussion with each other regarding the phonics skill?) and student understanding of phonics skills (i.e. Were they playing the game the way it was
intended to be played? Were they practicing the phonics skill or just guessing? Were they relying on others to answer the question(s) or play for them?).

I also took fieldnotes during guided reading to see if the skills were then being transferred in real reading situations. While students may have worked toward mastering the phonics skill during small group work, if the phonics game only offered practice in a decontextualized way, students may struggle during guided reading when faced with similar phonics work. I observed students during guided reading for behaviors such as miscuing while reading a portion of the text that directly related to the phonics skill taught, pointing out word(s) that possess the phonics skill taught, and whether or not students were able to create authentic writing pieces that support the phonics instruction. An example of the journal is attached in Appendix A.

Writing Samples

I collected student writing samples from authentic writing opportunities that may or may not indicate a transfer of knowledge of skills students learned during the mini-lesson and phonics games. The writing samples were collected from the same group of students being used as participants during the study. I used pseudonyms of all participants and photocopied each document for data analysis. Samples were in response to teacher-prompts, free writes, or other classwork. The writing was collected throughout the school day – not just during phonics instruction or guided reading. I collected one to two pieces of writing, per participant, per week, during the six weeks of data collection.
Semi-structured Interviews
By conducting informal interviews with my students, I talked to them about which phonics games they preferred playing, which games helped them learn skills that help them read or write, and other important information that aided in finding learning opportunities in phonics games. I conducted the interviews in the classroom during our English Language Arts block using a premade template as a basis for conversation. Student responses were jotted down on paper as each question was asked. An example of the interview template can be found in Appendix C.

Running Records
I administered running records on the same students I analyzed during small group phonics instruction. A running record is a form of progress monitoring that records a child’s oral reading behaviors, including miscues the reader makes, accuracy, and self-correction rate (Goetze & Burkett, 2010). By using running records in the classroom, I could gain a better insight into the minds of each reader, including the choices s/he makes as s/he decodes words while making meaning. The running record data were invaluable for this study in the sense that these data allowed me to track students who may be applying learned phonics skills through accuracy or self-corrections. By noting where students miscue, as well as where they self-correct, I hypothesized if the learned phonics skill via game transferred during authentic reading. An example of a running record form is attached in Appendix J.
Data Analysis

I analyzed my data in the following ways:

Phonics Game Rubric

Before and immediately after teaching the five individual phonics games, I completed the Instructional Phonics Game Rubric for each game. This rubric helped me determine if the game was considered poor, fair, quality, or high quality in the following areas: interest/engagement, whether the game promoted automatic word recognition skills, whether it fostered a connection to speaking and printing literacies, and if the game combined past phonics instruction with new (Pinnell & Fountas 2003; Morrow & Tracey 1997; Kowalyk & Deacon 2007; and Stahl 1992).

By classifying the games as poor, fair, quality, or high quality, and then supporting that data with student learning data, I could better assess which games best support successful learning of phonics skills that eventually transfer during authentic reading and writing experiences. The information gathered from analyzing each individual game helped in future instructional planning for myself and other first grade teachers. It allowed me to only choose phonics games from the Phonics Bundle that supported best practice and included opportunities for students to practice the learned skill in the context of real reading and writing.

Fieldnotes

My fieldnotes were structured in a two-column journal. The actual notes were scribed on the left-hand side of the journal, while the right-hand side was where I reflected upon how the lesson went, which students seemed to struggle or have questions, or other general observations. I observed how my students interacted during the games and reflected on whether or not their interactions/discussions supported the learning of phonics. I coded my fieldnotes for common themes using constant comparison methods. I first identified possible topics, clustered the topics
into categories, formed the categories into patterns, and then made explanations as to what the patterns suggest (Mertler & Charles, 2008). I used colored pencils when coding my work. I then annotated the codes for further reflection.

**Writing Samples**

The writing samples served as a way to triangulate my data. Not only did I observe how the phonics games influenced students’ reading development, but also I was interested in how the games influenced students’ writing skills. I annotated student work, looking for areas in which students applied or did not apply learned skills in the context of real writing. Again, I used a constant comparison method when analyzing this data. I looked for ways in which students possibly used a learned skill – this may have taken place in invented spelling. For example, if the phonics skill revolved around the “silent e” causing vowels to use their long sound, and a student wrote the word “cake” *cak*, then I know that s/he did not apply the new skill. On the other hand, invented spelling may have indicated a student was attempting the “silent-e” rule if s/he spelled the word *beat* as *bete*.

**Semi-structured Interviews**

I analyzed student interviews by looking for themes and patterns in the data, while thinking about what background knowledge or connections the students who responded comparably had in common. While using constant a comparison method, I analyzed the data for shared patterns of behaviors, beliefs, and language (Clark & Creswell, 2010). I looked for common themes or patterns of students who attended kindergarten together, came from similar backgrounds, or shared like-learning experiences. Likewise, I also noted differences amongst student responses, keeping in mind many of the same characteristics. This information helped me structure future mini-lessons, as well as techniques for teaching phonics. For example, if I
found that several students lacked foundational knowledge on short vowel sounds, I would have to revisit lessons regarding short vowel sounds before moving on with future phonics work.

**Running Records**

I completed all three levels of analysis with the running records administered – meaning, after having students read aloud to me, I kept track of his/her miscues, self-corrections, and other notable reading behaviors. After the student finished reading, I analyzed the student’s miscues and self-corrections as meaning, structure, or visual-based. If the student had self-corrected, I first analyzed his/her miscue, then the self-correction as meaning, structure, or visual. I then briefly described the student’s reading behaviors in terms of what s/he relied on, is strong with, and/or does not use. This information helped determine which skills or reading strategies students were doing, on the verge of doing, and/or not doing yet– and then compare and contrast this information with skills students were taught through phonics games. Again, I took into consideration that students process new information at differing rates.

**Case Studies**

Once all forms of data were collected and analyzed, I created an individual case study for each participant. This allowed me to look at each student’s reading and writing behaviors in terms of themes, patterns, and anomalies. I did this by looking across all forms of data – fieldnotes, writing samples, running records, and interviews. I took into consideration the actual quality of the games (once assessed through the rubric) and note how the quality of the game may influence participant learning.

After creating a case study for each participant, and searching for themes/patterns within each participant’s data, I looked across all five case studies in order to seek common themes, patterns, and/or outliers that may assist in responding to my research questions. I first looked at
all of the fieldnotes taken and reflected upon, hoping to find common themes. Then, I looked across the data for writing samples, interviews, and finally, running records. By first looking at each individual piece of data according to the participant, and then reviewing the data across the participant group, I could make stronger generalizations or hypotheses that support my initial questions.

**Procedures**

**Week One:**
- Introduced a new phonics game based on the Fountas and Pinnell Phonics bundle for mid-year. Taught mini-lesson on phonics game to small group, taught how to play the game or activity, and supported students in independent/partner practice.
- Analyzed phonics game based on Instructional Phonics Game Rubric.
- Took fieldnotes while students engaged in the game.
- Later on in the week, took anecdotal notes of students during guided reading. Noted miscues or successes with words/phrases that directly correlated to learned phonics skill.

**Week Two:**
- Introduced another phonics game. Taught mini-lesson on phonics game to small group, taught how to play the game or activity, and supported students in independent/partner practice.
- Analyzed phonics game based on Instructional Phonics Game Rubric.
- Interviewed a student to find out which game s/he preferred to play – last week’s game, or this week’s game. Talked to student about his/her answer. Took fieldnotes while students engaged in game.
- Later on in the week, took anecdotal notes of students during guided reading.
- Administered a writing task after guided reading that contained links to learned skills during phonics instruction. Kept samples to reflect on.

**Week Three:**
- Introduced another phonics game. Taught mini-lesson on phonics game to small group, taught how to play the game or activity, and supported students in independent/partner practice.
- Analyzed phonics game based on Instructional Phonics Game Rubric.
- Interviewed a student on which game s/he preferred playing out of all three weeks, and why they chose that game. Talked to student about which games s/he felt helped when reading and writing.
- Took more fieldnotes during gaming.
- Later on in the week, took a running record during guided reading. Analyzed with all three levels of analysis – coded and reflected for themes and links to phonics instruction.
Week Four:
- Introduced another phonics game. Taught mini-lesson on phonics game to small group, taught how to play the game or activity, and supported students in independent/partner practice.
- Analyzed phonics game based on Instructional Phonics Game Rubric.
- Took more fieldnotes during gaming.
- Collected random samples of writing from other content areas or assignments. Read and annotated student work for common themes or connections to phonics instruction.

Week Five:
- Introduced another phonics game. Taught mini-lesson on phonics game to small group, taught how to play the game or activity, and supported students in independent/partner practice.
- Analyzed phonics game based on Instructional Phonics Game Rubric.
- Interviewed a student on which game s/he preferred playing out of all five weeks, and why s/he chose that game. Talked to student about which games s/he felt helped him/her when reading and writing.
- Took more fieldnotes during gaming.
- Later on in the week, took another running record during guided reading. Analyzed with all three levels of analysis – coded and reflected for themes and links to phonics instruction.

Week Six:
- Reviewed all five phonics games with students and allowed them to choose which game they would like to play.
- Took fieldnotes during student engagement. Immediately after playing the game, had students complete a writing sample that correlated with the learned skills from all four games.
- Took anecdotal notes on student work samples that indicated a skill was learned/remembered from the phonics game or not.

Weeks Seven and Eight:
- Reviewed all data and organized into five case studies (one for each participant). Analyzed fieldnotes with reflections, coded interviews for themes, and reflected on student writing samples and running records.
- Looked for themes and patterns across all five case studies.
Criteria for Trustworthiness

Because I was the researcher as well as the teacher during this study, it was my objective to stay as unbiased as possible throughout its duration. I have acknowledged my own beliefs and philosophies as an educator in order for the reader to gain a more accurate depiction of my teaching. The validity of my research is of utmost importance, and I took several steps to ensure that the research was performed ethically and in a just manner. The study took place over a prolonged duration, with persistent observation of the five chosen participants. Several forms of data (interviews, fieldnotes, writing samples, running records, and anecdotal notes) were taken over the course of six weeks, both during reading instruction, as well as writing instruction. Because I assessed the children in both domains, my work was triangulated – therefore, more valid. Finally, I explored a negative case analysis, meaning that I was open to an array of diverse interpretations of my work in order to determine quality limitations and future implications.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation to this study is the fact that I had been working with the participants since the beginning of the school year in September. The small group of students chosen may have responded during interviews according to what they thought I expected to hear. Another limitation is that by the time the research was conducted, students may have been placed in new table groups (also the same groups as their phonics groups); therefore, the five participants may have only worked together in other contexts, yet not as a small group during phonics instruction. This may cause initial issues as students learned how to work with their new group mates. Finally, six weeks was a relatively short amount of time for first grade students to internalize
new learning and then apply them in real reading/writing contexts. I considered this as I conducted my research and reported my findings.

Summary

As the teacher researcher of this study, I used five of my first grade students as participants. The participants engaged in phonics instruction via the *Pinnell and Fountas Phonics Bundle – Grade 1* (2003). Over the course of six weeks, I introduced new phonics games, taught a mini-lesson surrounding the phonics skills, and had students practice together in small group. Throughout the study, I triangulated my data by taking fieldnotes, writing samples, semi-structured interviews, and running records during both reading and writing instruction. I analyzed each phonics game for inherent opportunities to apply learned skills in authentic reading and writing after students engage in the games. Teaching phonics in isolation without a balanced approach to literacy will not assist in creating flexible readers (Willows, 2008). My overall goal for this study was to show that while phonics is only *part* of ELA curriculum, it does provide word recognition strategies and a balanced attention to words and meaning (Dombey, 2011; Pinnell & Fountas, 2003; Willows, 2008).
Chapter Four: Findings

Introduction

This study was completed in order to examine what types of phonics games from the Pinnell and Fountas Phonics Bundle – Grade 1 promote quality phonics instruction in the context of real reading and/or writing. The study took place over the course of six weeks. Phonics instruction took place in a general education first grade classroom, during small group rotations. Each group contained five students, who were familiar with this type of phonics instruction prior to the start of the study. While all students in this first grade classroom experienced phonics instruction, only one group of five students was used during the actual study. Phonics instruction took place on Mondays, during one 25-minute session; however, skills were reinforced within various literacy opportunities throughout the rest of the week.

The five students used for this study were chosen at random, as I, the teacher-researcher, pulled their table number out of a hat. Within the group, there was one above-average reader and writer named Felicity* (*all names are pseudonyms). Felicity was in my highest guided reading group, and received additional challenge once a week with the school librarian, where she met with other high readers in a book club. Luke was another member of this group, who also received additional reading challenge with the school librarian. Unlike Felicity, Luke often was unfocused, distracted, and impulsive. While academically he was successful in several areas, Luke was observed for both signs of ADHD as well Autism. I worked with his parents, specialists, and school personnel throughout the year to get Luke the care he needed.

Max and Penny were two other members of this group who both displayed similar literacy characteristics. Penny came to first grade not being able to read – yet throughout the fall and winter semesters, Penny was reading at/slightly above grade level. However, her lack of
confidence held her back in many ways. Max showed similar traits in her reading and writing
development. Although she came into first grade being able to read and write, she tended to
hesitate when presented with something new. Ryan completed the group of five with his fun-
loving, and rambunctious attitude. Ryan was another student who was being observed for
ADD/ADHD, however, this did not get in the way of his academics. Ryan loved school and
enjoyed working in small groups.

**Research Questions**

This study was designed to be a qualitative, inquiry-based project, where I observed and
collected data from a group of five students during phonics instruction and at various literacy
opportunities throughout six, full school weeks. My research was based on two main questions:

*What kinds of learning opportunities are inherent in phonics games from the Pinnell and
Fountas Phonics Bundle – Grade 1? How might the phonics games support students
during authentic reading and writing activities?*

I collected data through fieldnotes, student interviews, running records, and writing samples. A
rubric was also created to analyze the Pinnell and Fountas Phonics games for quality. Fieldnotes
were collected while students played the phonics games, as well as during guided reading.
Student interviews were used to question students about their interest, knowledge, and inquiries
about phonics games used in the classroom. Running records were administered to determine
possible links between phonics skills taught and real reading experiences. Writing samples were
collected during the six-week study in order to establish where students reflected learned phonics
skills. All of the tools used provided for triangulation of data in this study.
Findings

The results of this study will be discussed in two ways. First, I will look at trends across the Instructional Phonics Game Rubric in order to address the first research question of: What kinds of learning opportunities are inherent in phonics games from the Pinnell and Fountas Phonics Bundle – Grade 1? Secondly, I will display my findings through individual case studies on each participant. The group under study was comprised of five students; however, I will display trends individually, and as a whole. Each case study will simply display the observations and trends I noticed, while using the data collected to show what was found. The data conveyed through the case studies will address the second research question of: How might the phonics games support students during authentic reading and writing activities? In chapter five, I will delve into how said findings help to draw interpretations from the data, as well as possible implications.

Phonics Game Outcomes

After implementing the phonics games chosen for this study, I analyzed each game using the Instructional Phonics Game Rubric that I created. I was able to determine which games promoted interest/engagement, linked word solving to meaning and structure, promoted automatic word recognition skills, had a connection to oral and print literacies, and combined past phonics instruction with new. Table 4.1 indicates the five games chosen from the Pinnell and Fountas (2003) Phonics Bundle – Grade 1 used in this study. The table displays the dates the games were implemented, the names of the games, and a summary of how to play each game.
Table 4.1 This table displays what Pinnell and Fountas Phonics Games were used throughout the five weeks of phonics instruction during this study. Each game has a brief description of its objective and rules of play.
**Instructional Phonics Game Rubrics**

Using the work of Pinnell and Fountas (2003), Morrow and Tracey (1997), Kowalyk and Deacon (2007), and Stahl (1992), I created a rubric for assessing each of the Pinnell and Fountas Phonics Games (2003) used in this study. The games were assessed based on the following categories: interest/engagement, linking word solving to meaning and structure, promoting automatic word recognition skills, connection to oral and print literacies, and combining past phonics instruction with new. The games were rated in each of the categories using the following scale: poor, fair, quality, or high quality. Each section on the Instructional Phonics Game Rubric has a description of what constitutes a rating of poor, fair, quality, and high quality. In addition, each section was scored based on my own observations documented in field notes, student conversations, work samples, and formative literacy assessments. See all five completed Instructional Phonics Game Rubrics in Appendices D-H.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Contraction Concentration</th>
<th>Follow the Path: Contractions</th>
<th>Mystery Sort</th>
<th>Singular/Plural Go Fish</th>
<th>Syllable Search</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interest/Engagement</strong></td>
<td>High Quality</td>
<td>High Quality</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>High Quality</td>
<td>High Quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Links word solving to meaning/structure</strong></td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>High Quality</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Promotes authentic word recognition skills</strong></td>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>High Quality</td>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>Quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Connection to oral and print literacies</strong></td>
<td>High Quality</td>
<td>High Quality</td>
<td>High Quality</td>
<td>High Quality</td>
<td>Fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Combines past phonics instruction with new</strong></td>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>High Quality</td>
<td>High Quality</td>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>Quality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2 This table displays the ratings from all five phonics games under the five categories being assessed.
Interest/Engagement

In looking across the data in the category of Interest/Engagement, four out of the five games received a score of “high quality.” The only game that received a lower score was during the week of May 20th, when the Mystery Sort game was rated as “fair.” These marks were based on observations and anecdotal notes throughout the five weeks of instruction. Students were mostly eager and anxious to play phonics games based on previously taught skills. Figure 6 displays an excerpt from a fieldnote taken while students played Contraction Concentration during the Week of May 6, 2013. The example shows my observations of Felicity as she played the game. She was excited; therefore she was also engaged and, consequently, helping others with the game as well. This particular game was deemed of high quality in the interest/engagement section of the rubric.

Figure 1

![Observation Protocol]

Figure 1: This figure displays an observational note taken while participants played Contraction Concentrations during the Week of May 6, 2013.
Felicity was eager, excited, and willing to help others while playing this particular game. Later in the study, students participated in a game called *Syllable Search* during the Week of June 3, 2013. This game also was deemed of high quality for interest and engagement. Figure 2 indicates the level of engagement from Luke, as he searched for words with various syllables using the class Word Wall. The example shows that Luke was extremely focused during this game. My reflective note indicates that Luke may have been so determined because he knew he was being timed, and typically enjoyed classroom competition.

**Figure 2**

![Observation Protocol](image)

> **Observation Protocol**
> **Participant Pseudonym:** Luke
> **Observation Date and Time:** 6/3/13
> **Length of Observation:** 25 min

Phonics Instruction with *Pinnell and Fountas Phonics Bundle – Grade One* (2003)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Activities (teacher and student)</th>
<th>Reflective Field Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely focused</td>
<td>knew he was being timed &amp; was competing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: This figure displays an observational note taken while students played *Syllable Search* the week of June 3, 2013.

While four out of the five games were deemed high quality under this category (*Interest/Engagement*), *Mystery Sort* (Week of May 20, 2013) was categorized as “Fair.” Figure 3 displays a clear change in behavior of participants, as Luke was confused by the game and did not follow directions the first time.
Figure 3: This figure displays an observational note taken while students played Mystery Sort during the Week of May 20, 2013.

The example shows an observation made of Luke at the beginning of the game. As a participant who typically understood directions the first time around, Luke stated he was “confused” and did not appear interested in playing the game because of it. He did not follow the directions that were given, which resulted in me reteaching the concept of the game to him.
Links word solving to meaning and structure

This section of the rubric focused on analyzing the games for evidence of linking decoding skills to meaning and structure – rather, not simply learning phonics through decontextualized practice, but in a whole language approach. Four out of the five games were rated as “fair,” with the third week’s Mystery Sort game ranked as “high quality.” The level of thinking and knowledge of language/word structure was more advanced during the Mystery Sort game, as opposed to the other four games. Figure 4 displays an example of one of the Mystery Sort recording sheets that Penny created. The first column of words Penny created was as follows: *know, knew, and into* with a heading of “n.” The second column of words was: *Morgan, Ian, want, and than* with a heading of “an.”
Figure 4: This figure displays Penny’s Mystery Sort during the week of May 20, 2013.

Penny used her knowledge of word structure to create a rule in the first column that expressed that the sound of *n* can be made with various combinations of letters – not solely with the letter *n*. 
While Penny’s work sample from *Mystery Sort* supports reasoning as to why the game was rated high quality, Figure 5 displays an excerpt from *Singular/Plural Go Fish* (Week of May 27, 2013) that supports why it was deemed of fair quality.

**Figure 5**

![Observational Note](image-url)

Figure 5: This figure displays an excerpt from an observational note taken while students played *Singular/Plural Go Fish* during the week of May 27, 2013.

The example shows that a participant was not able to place into context the term: *mice* nor *geese.* The structure of the words made no sense as isolated terms, as students were not able to place into context the words in order to gain meaning from them.

*Promotes automatic word recognition skills*

This portion of the phonics rubric assessed student ability to become independent and rapid in word recognition skills. The expectation after learning a new phonics skill was for students to eventually practice using the game at a fairly quick pace. In looking across the data, four out of five games were considered “quality,” while the *Mystery Sort* was considered “high quality” in this area. Again, *Mystery Sort* required students to use their knowledge of words to quickly analyze their partner’s pattern. In looking at the data, Max and her partner, Ryan, were asked to
quickly find the rule of sorting for each other’s words. Ryan was able to determine headings for Max’s columns, as shown in Figure 6. Max’s list of words was as follows: he, his, him, had, and house. She sorted her words based on the beginning letter and sound of “h.”
Figure 6: This figure displays Max’s Mystery Sort during the week of May 20, 2013.
One example of a game that did not receive a mark of “high quality” in this section was *Follow the Path: Contractions*.

**Figure 7**

![Handwritten note]

*Figure 7: This figure displays an excerpt from an interview with Ryan on May 21, 2013.*

In Figure 7, Ryan responded to a question regarding thinking about the phonics games during real reading and writing. His response linked back to *Follow the Path: Contractions*; however, he implies that he simply has memorized the way the words look, rather than recognizing them in context. Ryan has decontextualized knowledge this aspect of phonics. *Follow the Path: Contractions* was not deemed high quality because there was no authentic application of word reading – rather, students were just to recall what the contraction of two words were, or what two words created a contraction. See the game board used during this game in Appendix I.

**Connection to oral and print literacies**

This area of the rubric specifically speaks to the speaking and listening aspect of literacy, while at the same time, connecting it to print literacies. Four out of the five games were deemed “high quality” in this area, while *Syllable Search* was assessed as “fair.” Figure 8 shows an observation made while students played *Syllable Search*. 
The observation shows that Luke did not even leave my guided reading table to play the game. He only used the Word Wall words complete the search. While this was an independent activity, students were allowed to use any materials/resources (i.e. books, worksheets, magazines) to find words for each column. *Syllable Search* was an independent game in which students competed against one another to succeed – this did not promote speaking literacies.

However, the majority of Pinnell and Fountas Phonics Games require students to speak and listen to one another in order to play the game successfully, as well as read and record something via print. Figure 9 displays a fieldnote taken during the first week of the study in which Penny is actively engaged in conversation with her peers in order to construct meaning. My observation of Penny during this game showed that she was giving hints for her peers to find matches, and she also knew several contractions on her own. My reflection indicates that because Penny had strong contraction knowledge, she was able to help others in finding their own matches.
**Figure 9**

![Observation Protocol](image)

**Observation Protocol**

Participant Pseudonym: **Penny**
Observation Date and Time: 5/6
Length of Observation: 25 min.

Phonics Instruction with *Pinnell and Fountas Phonics Bundle – Grade One* (2003)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Activities (teacher and student)</th>
<th>Reflective Field Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>smiling, excited</em></td>
<td><em>Was able to help others: knows contractions on her own</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>good sport</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>gave hints for matches and knew many contractions</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 9: This figure displays an observation made of Penny while she played *Contraction Concentrations* during the Week of May 6, 2013.

*Combines past phonics instruction with new*

As indicated, the final section of the rubric analyzed how well the game combined past phonics instruction with new learning – the goal being to build upon prior knowledge with new instruction. Two out of the five games (*Follow the Path Contractions* and *Mystery Sort*) were noted as “high quality” in this area, while the remaining three games were considered “quality”.

*Follow the Path Contractions* related to the week’s previous game of *Contraction Concentrations* during the first two weeks of the study. Both games used the same playing cards (See Figure 10) and built upon learned skills. The figure shows examples of some of the word cards used during the weeks of May 6, 2013 and May 13, 2013.
Three games under this domain were not considered “high quality,” yet were still deemed “quality.” The games still supported foundational reading skills through phonics instruction.

The only difference between the three “quality” games versus the two “high quality” games, is that they were the first introduction of said skills, when the “high quality” games reinforced an already taught skill. One example of a “quality” game in this area was *Singular/Plural Go Fish* during the week of May 27, 2013. Figure 11 shows an assignment given after students played the game in the beginning of the week. Luke may have made errors in this assignment because it was initial instruction on singular versus plural nouns.
Summary

When looking across the data from all five Pinnell and Fountas (2003) phonics games, I can see that the games were of overall quality. I notice the Interest and Engagement category from the Mystery Sort during week three was the lowest rating across the board; however, Mystery Sort was deemed high quality in every other category. The category in which most games scored lowest in was linking word solving to meaning and structure. This finding sparks concern due to the process of reading involving all three cues of semantic, syntactic, and graphophonics. Students may be able to decode words in isolation; however, are not applying them with meaning and structure in mind. On the other hand, every game was deemed either quality or high quality under the category of combining past phonics instruction with new.
Because of the high level of social interaction embedded in all five games, the games were generally considered quality.

**Student Case Studies**

The five participants in this study displayed a wide range of ability levels and skill sets in all literacy domains. Some of the participants came into the group with a strong sense of decoding and comprehension (based on district-mandated assessments, Fountas and Pinnell benchmark scores, and guided reading anecdotal notes and running records), while others did not. Some of the participants came into the group as relatively strong writers for first grade (according to district-mandated writing prompts, work produced while following the district writing program, and observations), while others were still at an emergent level.

When looking at the data from all five participants, I noticed some clear trends. One of the more significant trends I noticed was that students were more engaged and interested in games that involved partner or group work. The games that were independent, or offered little opportunity to collaborate with a peer, were not of interest, nor were students engaged. When given the choice of which game to play during the last week of the study, the participant group overwhelmingly choice *Follow the Path: Contractions* due to its playful, cooperative nature.

I also noticed that students were applying the first two week’s phonics skill in authentic reading and writing experiences. The phonics game used during the second week (May 13, 2013) supported the skill taught during the first week’s game (May 6, 2013). Students built upon a learned skill for two weeks and applied it in both reading and writing situations. Finally, I noticed that the majority of the phonics games analyzed did not link word solving to meaning and structure. Using all three cueing systems while reading is both important and vital. If the
games are relying on one form of cues, students will not gain full understanding of phonics skills and how to apply them when reading or writing.

In the following sections, I will discuss the findings for each participant through mini-case studies of the students. I will display the trends I saw by working with each participant, as well as display data collected to support my observations. Once all of the participant case studies are presented, I will look across all of the data to confirm any trends noticed.

**Felicity**

As stated in the introduction, Felicity was part of my advanced reading group, and was considered above average in writing skills based on pre-assessments, writing pieces scored using the district mandated writing rubric, and comparison of her writing with that of her peers for the grade level standards. Over the course of the six weeks of study, I observed a high level of both engagement and excitement with Felicity when it came to actually playing the phonics games. She was automatic and rapid with her practice, and appeared eager to help others with the games (See Figure 1).

During the first week’s game (Week of May 6, 2013), *Contraction Concentration*, Felicity was able to quickly find the two words that matched a contraction. Contractions were a skill taught earlier in the school year, but only to Felicity’s guided reading group. Her guided reading group was ready to learn about contractions earlier in the year, while the rest of the class was ready in the beginning of May, when I taught this lesson in phonics groups. Throughout the first week, Felicity rapidly recalled contractions during phonics instruction, guided reading, writing opportunities, and at other points throughout the week when questioned. When given a morning work assignment on writing contractions that matched two words, she was able to
complete all six problems with 100% accuracy and no assistance. Figure 12 displays an excerpt from the contraction-based morning work. See the full assignment in Appendix P.

**Figure 12**

![Image of contraction exercises]

Figure 12: This figure displays an excerpt from a morning work assignment that related to contractions.

The following week’s phonics game (Week of May 13, 2013) built upon learned contraction skills, as students played a game called *Follow the Path: Contractions*. Felicity especially displayed high interest during this game, and appeared motivated to show off her knowledge of contractions. She was able and willing to assist others in the group during the game. At one point, Ryan was stuck on a card that read: *was not*. After several attempts, I prompted the group to help one another and Felicity chimed in with, “Ryan! If you put those together you get *wasn’t*!” Ryan quickly smiled and said, “Oh, yea!” (5/13/13).

During week three’s *Mystery Sort* (Week of May 20, 2013), Felicity did not display as high a level of interest as she did during the previous weeks. One routine in our classroom is to
look for words, word parts, and spelling patterns in books or throughout the room. This game aligned with our own routine, as students paired up to make their own sorts. Felicity was paired with Luke during this game. She left the two headings on her sort document blank and listed the following words in the left column: ten, this, tell, too, time (See Figure 13).

Figure 13

![Figure 13: This figure displays an excerpt from Felicity's Mystery Sort recording sheet.](image)

While not an advanced sort, Luke was able to determine her first sort contained words that all start with the letter T. When it was time for Felicity to solve Luke’s sort, she appeared stuck at first. After thinking for a while, while Luke giggled in the background, Felicity was able to determine that Luke chose words from the word wall that only have two letters: in, it, be, we. She was at first confused because Luke had (accidentally) written “I” under his column as well.
(See Appendix O). Felicity appeared to understand the concept of the game, as her confusion lied in noticing a mistake that Luke made in his sort. Once she realized that Luke accidentally wrote “I” under his column, she was able to identify the heading as “two-lettered words.”

Felicity was thrilled when she found out that the next phonics game introduced was a version of Go Fish (Week of May 20, 2013). Her interest and engagement during the game soared as she played *Singular/Plural Go Fish* with Max, her partner. Max and Felicity have played Go Fish together outside of school, according to the two friends; however, they have not played this version before. Through observation, Felicity appeared ready to play the game and appeared eager to begin – so eager that she may have failed to listen to the mini-lesson prior to playing time. Figure 14 shows Felicity’s urgency to play the game.

**Figure 14**

| Only needed me to give brief directions. Was ready to play before the rest of the group was ready. |

Felicity’s written work reflected her possible lapse of listening to instruction, as she made errors when completing work on singular and plural nouns throughout the rest of the week (See Figure 15).
Finally, Felicity was initially thrilled when introduced to *Syllable Search* during the fifth week of the study (Week of May 27, 2013); however, after I gave directions, she was pulled for a special reading group with the school librarian.

In general, Felicity flourished with timed tasks and appeared to love competition. After assessing each individual case, I noticed that the majority of participants enjoyed the phonics games that required partner or small group work. Felicity was no exception, as she enjoyed working with other participants, while keeping a friendly yet competitive tone. She did well with the one independent game due to her interest in timed tasks; however, overall, Felicity was more engaged during social games.

Her knowledge of one and two syllabled words was strong, as assessed through guided reading and other literacy-based activities throughout the day. Another trend that will be discussed across the participants, yet was also seen in Felicity’s case, is the notion of isolated phonics skills versus whole language implications. Felicity was more successful when
completing assignments or reading in small group where the skills being assessed were embedded in the context of real reading or writing. When the skills were assessed in isolation, Felicity made errors in her work (see Figure 15).

Because Felicity was reading and writing above grade level benchmarks for the point in the school year in which the study took place (May-June), several of the skills taught during the study were review or reinforcement for her. Felicity appeared to have a solid grasp of the phonics skills presented, and used the games as a way to confirm her assumptions about skills and/or practice using them in a variety of ways. The social aspect of the games provided an avenue for Felicity to share her knowledge with other participants.

**Ryan**

A physically active member of the study group, Ryan was an enthusiastic learner who enjoyed school to the full extent. He appeared excited to learn any new game, but especially loved games that involved pieces or cards. During the first week, when playing *Contraction Concentration* (Week of May 6, 2013), Ryan remembered that all contractions could be broken into two words. He also realized that contractions have apostrophes in them. Initially, Ryan was stumped on the contraction, “I’ll,” as he stated, “What am I looking for?” As we continued to play the game, Ryan later picked up “I will” on one card and remembered that the matching card was “I’ll.”
Figure 16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Activities (teacher and student)</th>
<th>Reflective Field Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>turned over 2 sets of cards</td>
<td>Ryan knew that contractions have apostrophes. He only picked up the &quot;broken&quot; version.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- you are</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- did not</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I didn’t even get a contraction!&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 16: This figure displays an observation made of Ryan while he played *Contraction Concentration* during the week of May 9, 2013.

Ryan’s engagement continued into the next week, as he played *Follow the Path: Contractions* (Week of May 13, 2013). He was especially excited to be playing a board game.

During this second week, I noticed a few key understandings during Ryan’s guided reading group. Ryan almost jumped out of his seat when silent reading at my kidney-shaped table when he came across contractions in the text. As documented in anecdotal notes, Ryan blurted out that he found *wouldn’t* or *would not* as others were reading (See Appendix L). I had not asked the students to specifically find contractions; however, Ryan noticed them independently.

Figure 17

Figure 17: This figure displays an anecdotal note taken during guided reading with Ryan.
After two weeks of working with contractions – both during phonics instruction and real reading/writing instruction, Ryan was beginning to notice common contractions and use their matches (two words) interchangeably.

When interviewed (5/21/13) (See Appendix M), Ryan enthusiastically expressed how much he loved phonics stations because of the games played. He confirmed my notion that he liked card and board games by telling me that he preferred playing the games that had them – continuing on to say that he has a deck of cards at home. When asked if he considers phonics instruction important, Ryan replied with, “It helps you learn – you need to play fairly” (5/21/13). Ryan’s own confidence regarding reading was displayed when he expressed that he was good at reading due to the games helping him read certain words that are posted on cards or the board. Taking it one step further, Ryan was able to connect his own learning to a specific phonics game, *Follow the Path: Contractions*.

**Figure 18**

![Interview Excerpt](image)

Figure 18: This figure displays an excerpt from an interview with Ryan on May 21, 2013.

Ryan told me that he remembers several of the words from that game when he is trying to write words down.

During week three of the study (Week of May 20, 2013), I administered a running record for Ryan on a text being read in guided reading. The text was titled *Fifty States, One Country* by Newbridge Publishing. After reading a portion of the text to me, I determined through analysis
that Ryan focuses mainly on visual cues, as he made miscues that revolved around a visual understanding of how words look. Ryan neglected meaning and structure and inserted words that looked right, even if they did not sound right.

**Figure 19**

![Figure 19: This figure displays an excerpt from a running record assessment given to Ryan during a guided reading group.](image)

The figure above displays one error that Ryan made while reading. He read the word, *for* when the real text read, *from*. During analysis, I recognized that Ryan was using a visual cue (looking at the letter “f”) and substituting with a word he knew. In this particular text, “*for*” did not structurally match the sentence. This led me to believe (as indicated at the top of the figure) that Ryan neglects meaning and structure cues while relying heavily on visual. These types of miscues affect Ryan’s overall comprehension of the text. With this being said, the words on which Ryan miscued were not necessarily linked to new learned skills taught through phonics instruction. (See Running Record in Appendix N).
During the week of May 27th, Ryan participated in phonics instruction surrounding singular and plural nouns. Initially, Ryan was attentive and participating actively during *Singular/Plural Go Fish*; however, as students were given assignments throughout the week that reflected the learned skill, Ryan was not able to apply his knowledge of singular and plurals. Ryan was not able to identify the majority of plural nouns written after reading several sentences.

**Figure 20**

![Figure 20: This excerpt displays part of Ryan’s morning work surrounding singular/plural nouns.](image)

This writing activity was one that was to be completed independently. While Ryan appeared to understand singular and plural nouns during the phonics card game, when asked to identify them independently, he was shaky. With that being said, Ryan was still able to understand singular/plural nouns in the context of real reading and writing. In an authentic writing piece produced after reading *Harvey Potter’s Balloon Farm* by Mark Buehner, Ryan appeared to understand the concept of plural versus singular nouns in his own work (See Figure 20). Ryan used the term, *seed* in its proper form when writing about the “Mario Disc Seeds” he created. Understanding singular/plural concepts through real reading and writing is arguably more important that understanding them in an isolated manner.
Figure 21

Figure 21: This figure displays an excerpt from Ryan’s writing piece. He created an imaginary type of seed that could grow in the ground. Ryan was able to use “seed” in the singular sense, as he was dictating that one should “water the Mario seed disc” until it grows.

In another independent activity, Ryan was unable to determine which words were considered plural out of a set of two sentences (See Figure 22 and see Appendix O for full document).

Figure 22

Figure 22: This figure displays an excerpt from an assignment on singular versus plural nouns, completed by Ryan. Although Figure 22 shows that Ryan was able to identify the noun that represented more than one in the first example, he was unsuccessful in examples 2 through 4. After further explicit instruction throughout the week, as well as extra time spent working with singular and plural

Cardella
nouns, Ryan continued to display signs of confusion regarding singular and plural nouns. Part of the confusion may have laid in the notion that Ryan did not read the directions on the assignment carefully; however, in another singular/plural assignment, Ryan rewrote two sentences using singular nouns, when he was supposed to identify the words that mean more than one. (See Figure 23). While Ryan sometimes struggled to identify singular versus plural forms of words when completing assignments, he was able to identify them in the context of real reading and in his own writing. This leads me to believe that Ryan was simply not reading the directions completely when answering questions independently.

**Figure 23**

![Assignment Excerpt](image)

Figure 23: This figure displays an excerpt from an assignment completed by Ryan on singular versus plural nouns.

One of the trends that Felicity displayed that carried through when looking at Ryan’s data was his interest and engagement throughout the week’s games. He was part of the majority who enjoyed the social aspect of the games and thrived when working with a partner or in small group. Ryan had a passion to learn and was always willing to take risks – this may have been in his favor as he played games like *Contraction Concentration* or *Singular/Plural Go Fish.*
While Ryan received additional support for reading in the form of Reading Resource, and Felicity received additional *challenging* support in reading in the form of the school librarian, both students were able to play the phonics games together and create meaning with one another. Felicity was able to understand certain skills (like singular/plural) in isolation, as well as in context, while Ryan was only able to understand them in the context of real reading and writing.

This again confirms a trend seen in the Felicity case study regarding phonics skills in isolation versus a whole language context. Ryan was more successful during guided reading group or writing workshop in terms of displaying the newly learned skills. When asked to complete assignments independently (which often presented the skills in isolation), Ryan floundered.

**Luke**

Luke was a member of the group of study who needed the most individual attention and care due to his special needs. Throughout the course of the school year, Luke was being assessed for both ADHD and signs of Autism. He was impulsive, socially immature, and often lacked focus. Aside from the challenges that Luke faced, he was still an academically strong student. Luke soared when completing independent phonics work or personal challenges; however, he had an extremely difficult time participating in partner or small group work/games.

During the week of May 20, 2013, Luke played *Mystery Sort*, a game in which he was required to work with a partner. After listening to a mini-lesson about sorting words by patterns in letters and sounds (a concept we had been building all year), I gave the directions for playing the game and sent the students off in pairs. Luke immediately displayed a lack of understanding as he expressed how confused he was (See Figure 24). After seeing his confusion, Felicity
(Luke’s partner) attempted to share the directions with him. Luke appeared to ignore her and put two headings down on his paper. Felicity was supposed to guess the headings after Luke created two separate lists of words.

**Figure 24**

![Image of handwritten notes]

Figure 24: This figure displays an observation made of Luke when he began playing *Mystery Sort* during the Week of May 20, 2013.

While he was able to correctly guess her sort, he put his headings down before Felicity was able to guess. After the game was completed, I spoke with Luke about his sort. He tried to create a list of words that have two letters each; however, on his list he put the word “I.” When we spoke about it, Luke realized his mistake and added the words “we” and “be” instead. Figure 25 shows one of Luke’s sorts. He gave it the heading of “pet” with a “th” next to it. I was extremely confused by Luke’s heading; when asked why he labeled it as such, he had no reason for putting the heading down.
Figure 25: This figure displays one of Luke’s sorts created for his partner to discover. He expressed that his sort was all “two letter words;” however, he put a lowercase, i down as well.
The challenge Luke faced when working with others was controlling his impulsivity and being fair. During both week one and week two of contraction work (5/6/13 & 5/13/13), Luke used unkind words with other group members and was unfocused during instruction and playing the game; however, when observed during guided reading, Luke appeared to understand the concept of contractions. After reading a leveled text during one particular group session, I asked Luke to take a sticky note and make a list of all of the contractions in the book. He was able to do this with no help and found all of the contractions in the text.

**Figure 26**

![Contractions](image.png)

*Figure 26: This figure displays the contractions that Luke discovered and wrote down after reading a leveled text during guided reading.*

As Luke independently read his leveled text during guided reading, I gave him a sticky note to write down any contractions he noticed. He came up with the following list: *can’t, won’t, shouldn’t, don’t,* and *aren’t.* This understanding of contractions showed that Luke was in the process of learning the skill. While he was able to apply it during reading, Luke was still learning to write contractions. This notion is typical of beginning readers and writers. Instead of writing the contractions, Luke simply rewrote the two words again (See Figure 27 and see full activity in Appendix P).
The directions for the assignment shown in Figure 27 were to convert the two words into a contraction that completed the sentence. For the majority of the blanks, Luke simply rewrote the two words. For some reason, he put a question mark in the blank for number 2 – he neither attempted to rewrite the two words, nor write the contraction.

Even though Luke struggled with several of the social aspects of the phonics games, he thrived during the week of June 3, 2013 when students played *Syllable Search*. Luke often enjoyed being timed for various tasks throughout the school day and considered it a “challenge.” *Syllable Search* was a game of high interest to Luke, as he was extremely engaged and excited to play.
Figure 28

The figure shows observations made of Luke as he played the game. He was more focused and engaged during this game than the other games. Luke knew he was being timed and was competing independently against the other participants. His determination and effort paid off, as Luke came in first place with the most correct words under each heading (See Appendix O).

Figure 29

Figure 29: This figure displays an excerpt from Luke’s Syllable Scavenger Hunt during the week of June 3, 2013.
Luke was able to identify words from the class word wall, as well as peer names, which fit under the headings of one-, two-, three-, and four-syllable words. I witnessed Luke tapping on the table as a method to determine how many syllables a word has. This was a strategy that I taught in the mini-lesson.

As was Luke’s nature, he had areas of great strength (syllables), as well as areas of need (word patterns). Unlike the other group members, Luke thrived with independent games. He was most successful when working alone, when the other participants seemed to build off of each other’s knowledge to make meaning. Luke was the exception to the trend, as he was more successful when working solo.

As with Felicity and Ryan’s cases, Luke was able to recognize and apply phonics skills in authentic situations, while sometimes recognizing them in isolation (for example, Luke was able to find contractions within a text; however, when asked to create contractions in a morning work assignment, he was not able to). Another trend noticed in both Luke and Felicity’s case studies was the notion of being timed as a form of motivation. Both participants enjoyed friendly competition and appeared to work harder at the phonics game/applying the skill when they knew they were being timed and competing against others. As I continue looking at individual cases from each participant, I notice the same trends reoccurring.

**Max**

Max was considered one of my “go to” students in the classroom. She was spunky, bright, and had a great sense of humor. Sometimes Max could be considered too much of leader in the sense that she was bossy; but most of the time, Max was eager to learn and apply a new skill. She thrived in social settings; therefore, all five weeks of phonics instruction and gaming were of interest to her.
In particular, Max enjoyed the first two week’s games of *Contraction Concentration* and *Follow the Path: Contractions* (Week of May 6 and Week of May 13, 2013). After a lesson on contractions, Max was ready to play concentration. Through observation, I noticed her pick up the word card stating, *I am*. I asked Max, “What would you be looking for?” to which she replied, “I’m.” Her understandings of contractions throughout the game were quick and automatic. At one point during *Contraction Concentration*, Max picked up “don’t” and said that she was looking for “does not.” Ryan quickly corrected her and said, “No! You’re looking for do not!” to which Max quickly corrected herself (5/9/13). I noted that Max’s rapid recall of contractions may be too rushed and causing her to make small errors (See Figure 30).

**Figure 30**

| Turned over “don’t” and said is looking for “does not” | Quick, automatic |
| Ryan corrected her and said she is looking for “do not” |
| Maybe too rushed and makes mistakes? |

Figure 30: This figure displays an observation made of Max while she played *Contraction Concentration* on May 9, 2013.

Again, Max’s quick application of knowledge may have caused her to miscue during guided reading the week of May 9, 2013. When reading a leveled text, Max interchanged the word, “didn’t” when the text read, “doesn’t.” When corrected, she quickly said, “Oh, yeah!” (See Appendix L).

Interestingly, Max’s enthusiasm for group games, as well as her spunky nature, fell to the wayside when asked to whisper-read aloud to me during a guided reading session. On most
occasions, I took anecdotal notes on Max’s reading (See Appendix L); however, I also took running records from time to time. On one occasion in particular, Max displayed her lack of confidence reading aloud through her record, as she often made appeals and/or was told an unknown word after given strategies.

**Figure 31**

![Running Record Excerpt](image_url)

Figure 31: This figure displays an excerpt from a running record completed during a guided reading group with Max. It shows Max’s uneasiness reading aloud, as she often made appeals and/or was told an unknown word.

Figure 31 displays a portion of a running record administered with Max during a guided reading session. When Max came across the word, *directions*, she appealed for help. I prompted her with, “reread the sentence and see what makes sense.” When Max reread the sentence, she was able to read *directions* correctly. When she got to the word, *appears*, Max got flustered again. When prompted with, “look at the beginning sounds,” and “what word makes sense in this sentence?” Max looked at me with a puzzled look. She tried to decode the word but was getting flustered, so I told her the word. Max *appeared* to have developed a strong bank of reading skills throughout the year – specifically in decoding; however, when asked to read aloud in front of me, she often miscued. Reading aloud in class was never an issue, nor was reading with a partner (as I often observed). Max may have been displaying anxious qualities when reading aloud to me because she did not want to “disappoint me” with her reading skills. She thrived in group and partner work, yet did not appear as motivated or engaged in individual or 1:1 activities. Another possible reason behind her hesitant nature when reading to me could be her
misunderstanding of the text – she may not understand how the phonics skills learned aid in her decoding, or the level text was not just right.

One thing that Max was able to do was connect newly learned phonics skills across the study, as she incorporated contraction understanding during the week of Mystery Sort (Week of May 20, 2013).

**Figure 32**

Figure 32: This figure displays an observation of Max while she played Mystery Sort on May 21, 2013.

Figure 32 displays an observation made of Max while she played Mystery Sort during the week of May 20, 2013. After the mini-lesson on word parts and patterns, Max appeared to understand how to play. She was eager to begin and decided to make one of her sorts with contractions. Her partner was Ryan. For her sort, she created two lists with two different themes. Ryan was able to discover how Max sorted the words. The first column’s words all began with the letter H, while the second column included all contractions (See Appendix O).
Figure 33: This figure displays part of Max’s two sorts during the *Mystery Sort* game. The first column shows words that all begin with *h*, while the second column displays only contraction words.

In a writing assignment administered on May 23, 2013 (a few weeks after the contraction lessons), Max applied her learned knowledge with no teacher prompts. Students were learning about one-room schoolhouses and visited one on a field trip. After the field trip, I asked students to compare and contrast the schoolhouse from the past and current school. Max was able to do so and even included four contractions in her writing (See Appendix P).
After writing down what Max learned about school back when there were one-room schoolhouses, she wrote down what she noticed about modern-day school. Max used the contraction “we’ve” to express that, “Now, we have [we’ve] more rooms and more teachers. We have [we’ve] got a word wall.” She also used the contraction “don’t” to express that they did not have a word wall.

During one of the final projects of the school year, Max displayed many of her newly learned phonics skills in her published writing piece. I read *Harvey Potter’s Balloon Farm* by Mark Buehner and asked students to think of a unique type of seed that might grow out of the ground. Max wrote about “cupcake seeds” and created an entire outline of how the seeds would be grown.
In her writing, *Harvey Potter’s Balloon Farm* by Mark Buehner she correctly used singular and plural nouns, as well as contractions (See Appendix P for full writing piece). The figure above displays a portion of Max’s writing that shows her knowledge of singular versus plural nouns. She properly made the words: *sprinkles* and *seeds* plural in order to convey more than one. The skills taught throughout the study were cited in her work.

As the study wrapped up in the month of June 2013, I interviewed Max to see how phonics games may have helped her in her reading/writing development. Max loved answering questions about her learning and was able to express how specific skills have assisted her growth. Figure 36 shares an excerpt from Max’s interview, while the full interview can be found in Appendix M.
Max’s spunky attitude came out in her interview when she stated, “I just said that!” Max felt that she had expressed thoroughly how much she enjoyed the phonics games, as well as how they have helped her. Although she was being a bit silly when stating that she already spoke about the “rules” in phonics, I could tell through Max’s interview data that she truly understood the importance behind studying phonics. Max was able to internalize the phonics skills and then apply them in her reading and writing. As a teacher, it is so important for my students to understand and appreciate the purpose behind instruction, and Max conveyed this during our conversation on June 6, 2013.

In thinking about Max’s learning throughout the study in comparison with the other participants, the major difference noticed was her lack of self-confidence when reading aloud to me. The other participants were eager and confident when whisper-reading during guided reading. This was a regular habit in our classroom, as I was always taking anecdotal notes or running records. Max’s enthusiasm came back out when playing the actual phonics games – she enjoyed all of the games, but specifically the group or partner games (as was the trend). Towards the end of the study, Max had a play date with Felicity and asked to bring home the Singular/Plural Go-Fish cards to play with her!
She was able to utilize the phonics skills in both authentic and isolated situations – this notion was different than the trend seen across the other participants. Most participants were successful displaying knowledge of phonics instruction through authentic reading and writing activities rather than in isolated cases. Max was able to show her knowledge both ways.

**Penny**

Penny was a sweet, quiet little girl who appeared enthusiastic to learn anything new in school. She was a model student and could be counted on to do the right thing. While Penny’s academics were in general, of average ability, once she caught onto a concept or topic, she was able to apply it in other areas. During the first week of phonics instruction for the study (Week of May 6, 2013), Penny was eager to learn a new game. She enjoyed independent, partner, and small group games and was a fair player. During *Contraction Concentration* (Week of May 6, 2013), Penny was able to give hints to other players on what matches they should be looking for when it was their turn to flip over a card. She was smiling, bubbly, and a good sport when she did not find her own matches.

**Figure 37**

![Figure 37](image)

Figure 37: This figure displays an observation made of Penny during while she played *Contraction Concentration* on May 9, 2013.
The above figure shows an excerpt from an observation made of Penny while she played the concentration game. She was extremely engaged and was displaying her knowledge of contractions by helping others through giving hints.

After working with contractions during the weeks of May 6-13, 2013, Penny was able to apply her learning during guided reading. As indicated in observation notes from May 13, 2013, Penny found several contractions in her leveled text (See Appendix L). At first, Penny thought that *owl’s* was a contraction; however, she corrected herself and said, “Oops! That means he owns something. Like when we do our Star Student papers” (5/13/13). Penny was referring to a lesson I had implemented about possessive apostrophes. She was then able to create the following list of contractions: *they’re = they are, can’t = cannot, don’t = do not.*

**Figure 38**

Figure 38: This figure displays observations made of Penny during a guided reading group. Penny was asked to search the text for contractions. Once she found several, I asked her to define them by the two words each contraction is made up of. She was successful in all examples.
Figure 38 shows a portion of the notes taken during guided reading as Penny independently read a text, followed by Penny’s results from her contraction hunt. The observation indicates that Penny was the lowest within her guided reading group; however, she was still in an advanced reading group for her grade level. Penny started the school year off as an early emergent reader, and quickly progressed to above average for her age. She was deliberate and persevered through difficult words and concepts. When thinking about this aspect of Penny’s development, I can’t help but consider how the phonics instruction has impacted her learning. Penny appears to benefit from small group phonics instruction with application in real reading and writing. Her reading has advanced due to direct instruction of skills, with practice in authentic ways.

When interviewed during the week of May 20, 2013, Penny stated that she enjoyed phonics games because they were fun. She helped confirm my hypothesis that the phonics games were engaging and fun for students – especially the partner and small group work. Her favorite games included Blends Go Fish (a game not played during this study, but previously taught) and Follow the Path Contractions (Week of May 13, 2013). Her reasoning behind liking both games was that, “You get to do fun stuff and roll the dice. They are fun to play” (See Appendix M).

When asked why she thinks phonics games are important, she stated, “Because you have to learn these games.” It appeared as if Penny did not understand the question, or did not understand the importance of phonics; however, when asked if she felt that phonics games helped her learn to read/write, she responded positively and even alluded to using contractions in her writing (See Figure 39). Penny was beginning to show signs of understanding how reading and writing are linked under the domain of literacy. At the end of our interview, Penny expressed how the contraction games help her think about words when she reads.
When asked if Penny feels that phonics games help her learn to read or write, and if yes, how, Penny responded with, “Sort of – because sometimes we write or sometimes we read when we do stations. I have used contractions in my writing” (Fig. 39, Interview with Penny on 5/31/13). She might not have been able to eloquently express how phonics has affected her literacy development; however, her work and other data prove otherwise.

During the same week of being interviewed, Penny displayed clear understanding of word patterns and sounds when she completed a Mystery Sort with her partner (Week of May 20, 2013). Penny created two lists of words. In the first column, she sorted the words: know, knew, into and in the second column, she sorted the words: Morgan, Ian, want, than. Penny’s knowledge of word patterns and choice led her to create a sort with the sound of “n” (first column) and a sort with the sound that “an” makes. Her partner was eventually able to decode how she sorted her words (See Figure 40).
As the study continued and participants explored singular versus plural forms of nouns the week of May 27, 2013, Penny displayed mixed understanding. She enjoyed playing *Singular/Plural Go Fish* (which was similar to *Blends Go Fish* that she loved, as indicated in her interview); however, when in the context of real reading, Penny struggled with decoding the plural form of *body*.

**Figure 41**

- stuck on *bodies*  
  - plural of *body* ✓

Figure 41 displays an observational note taken during a guided reading session with Penny.

After a few days of instruction regarding singular versus plural nouns, Penny was unable to
decide what the singular version of “bodies” is. While the plural version of body is one that is difficult for first graders to comprehend due to the -y changing to –ies, I would have assumed that Penny would be able to express what the singular version was based on context.

Penny was a risk-taker when it came to reading aloud, and was determined to decode words on her own. She typically learned skills quickly and (if prompted initially) could decode words on her own with no teacher help. In this case, Penny came across the word bodies, and after a while, Penny looked to me for further instruction. I related the word to our phonics instruction on plural nouns by asking Penny what the singular version of bodies was. She was extremely confused and eventually was told the word.

Interestingly, Penny was able to apply singular versus plural noun knowledge in morning work assignment that she received full credit on, with no teacher assistance. While Figure 42 does not display Penny’s trouble with changing words that require an ending change when making them plural (i.e. body to bodies), it does show that Penny has a solid understanding of making words plural that do not require an ending change.

**Figure 42**

![Figure 42: This figure displays an excerpt of Penny’s morning work assignment. The assignment linked the taught skill of plural versus singular nouns.]

In this exercise, Penny was able to find the noun in the sentence and convert it to plural form. While this is only a portion of Penny’s work, she was able to complete the entire assignment with 100% accuracy.
One of the reoccurring trends seen throughout this study was the notion of socialization as a means to learning and making meaning. Penny was no exception when it came to interest in group/partner games. During the final week of the study, Penny agreed with the group that they should play *Follow the Path: Contractions* again (Week of June 10, 2013).

**Figure 43**

![Figure 43: This figure displays observations made of Penny while she played *Follow the Path: Contractions* with her peers on June 10, 2013.](image)

As the group played, I noticed a stronger sense of confidence in Penny. Although quiet, Penny is the type of child who is constantly listening and aware of her surroundings. She is an eager student who wants to please and wants to learn. She displayed these attributes the first time we played *Follow the Path* (Week of May 13, 2013); however, the second time it was played (Week
of June 10), I noticed that Penny was really coming out of her shell. She was cheerful, spunky, and more communicative than usual. This makes me think that Penny may benefit from multiple exposures to skills before becoming confident enough to apply them independently. This data might suggest that Penny also benefits from working with others in a social setting to form meaning; whereas, she may not have the same method of learning in other activities. The phonics skills taught thorough games were an opportunity for Penny to collaborate with others to share knowledge in order to deepen her understanding of foundational reading skills.

**Looking Across the Case Studies**

After laying out all of the data collected over the course of this study, I noticed clear trends amongst the participants. Four out of the five participants thrived during the weeks where phonics skills taught were practiced in small group or with partners. The one student who was more successful in independent practice was Luke, who was also being assessed for Autism signs by a behavioral specialist, as well as the school counselor. The fact that he had trouble working with others to begin with may have affected his learning in the area of phonics when presented using collaborative methods. Although Chapter Five will delve into implication of the data analysis presented in this chapter, this first trend suggests that in general, students learn best in social settings – making meaning by working with each other and collaborating with a common objective in mind.

Another trend noticed across the case studies reflects a section of the Instructional Phonics Game Rubric: Linking word solving to meaning and structure. Several of the phonics games played were neither high quality, nor quality, when it came to authentic reading and writing experiences. Proficient readers use all three cues to read with understanding and
meaning. Many of the skills taught were practiced in isolation (for example, *Singular/Plural Go Fish, Syllable Search*) and did not provide opportunities for authentic application. However, with that being said, as the classroom teacher I was able to provide these experiences for my students after teaching them the skill. The games alone did not provide a comprehensive practice of the phonics skill – real reading and writing needed to take place in addition to practicing the games.

Finally, I noticed that as students read aloud to me during guided reading, most of them were able to locate where phonics skills appear in the context of real reading. In the beginning of the study, I gave more prompts as to locating concepts that we learned, like contractions, but as the study continued, participants were able to point said concepts out on their own. The participants were largely able to apply learned skills in the context of their own reading, as well as pull out the skills in isolation. This was true for their writing as well. Participants began using the phonics taught in their own writing. I noticed that the skill taught appeared most often in their writing during the same week that the skill was introduced. This may be because it was “fresh in their mind” and they were able to apply it more easily; however, I noticed that participants were applying skills learned in the beginning of the study during the last week of the study in June 2013.

Overall, I am happy that the phonics games used provided an engaging, collaborative learning environment for students to thrive. While some of the games were of higher quality than others, I, their teacher, also exposed students to the skills during authentic reading and writing opportunities. Through these opportunities, students were able to practice the skills learned during small group instruction. The games were a vehicle to reinforce important phonics concepts that all early readers should know.
Summary

Chapter Four described the interpretation of data that were collected from this study. Data were triangulated by using observation notes, student interviews, writing samples, running records, and an instructional phonics game rubric in order to determine which Pinnell and Fountas Phonics games are considered of quality, and how they might influence authentic reading and writing experiences. Information was collected during small group phonics instruction, guided reading, and at other times during the school day. The data were analyzed to determine how phonics instruction through games impacts authentic reading and writing development.
Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

This study looked at several phonics games from the Pinnell and Fountas Phonics Bundle – Grade 1. A group of five participants were studied over the course of six weeks in order to determine if the games presented were considered poor, fair, quality or high quality, as well as if the instruction given supported student literacy growth in an authentic way. The games were incorporated in small group instruction in a first grade classroom. The participants were randomly selected to be observed during phonics instruction, as well as during normal school day routines.

The research questions for this study were as follows:

What kinds of learning opportunities are inherent in phonics games from the Pinnell and Fountas Phonics Bundle – Grade 1? How might the phonics games support students during authentic reading and writing activities?

While the games were analyzed using Instructional Phonics Game Rubrics, authentic application of literacy skills were looked at through real writing samples, guided reading notes, student interviews, field notes, and running records. All of the tools used in this study provided for triangulation of data.

Conclusions

After careful documentation and analysis of the data collected during this six-week study, three specific trends rose to the surface. The first trend that I noticed connects student engagement with socialization. The second trend noticed concerns a specific aspect of the
Instructional Phonics Game Rubric: *Linking word solving to meaning and structure*. Finally, the third trend observed was that participants were beginning to apply newly learned phonics skills during authentic reading and writing activities. The following three sections will delve into each trend as a means to support the two research questions explored.

*Students are more engaged during instruction when able to work with a partner or small group*

One of the more prominent trends of the study revolved around the notion of student social interaction as a means to learning. After looking across the data, my observations (along with student input), suggested that students learn best in social settings, making meaning by working with each other and collaborating with a common objective in mind. Four out of the five participants were more engaged in the phonics games when given the chance to work with a partner or play in small group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phonics Game Ratings</th>
<th>Contraction Concentration</th>
<th>Follow the Path: Contractions</th>
<th>Mystery Sort</th>
<th>Singular/Plural Go Fish</th>
<th>Syllable Search</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interest/Engagement</td>
<td>High Quality</td>
<td>High Quality</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>High Quality</td>
<td>High Quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Links word solving</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>High Quality</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to meaning/structure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotes authentic</td>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>High Quality</td>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>Quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>word recognition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>skills</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection to oral</td>
<td>High Quality</td>
<td>High Quality</td>
<td>High Quality</td>
<td>High Quality</td>
<td>Fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and print literacies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combines past phonics</td>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>High Quality</td>
<td>High Quality</td>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>Quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>instruction with new</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1 This table displays the ratings from all five phonics games under the five categories being assessed.
Table 5.1 displays the five phonics games used throughout the study, as well individual areas the
games were evaluated under, as dictated in the Instructional Phonics Game Rubric. The trend
surrounding social interaction as a means to learning specifically speaks to the area of the rubric
under: *Interest/engagement*. Four out of five games were deemed “high quality” under this
heading – the only game that was analyzed as “fair” was *Mystery Sort* (Week of May 20, 2013).

Coincidentally, four out of five participants were observed as having fun, being engaged,
and interested while playing the “high quality” *Interest/engagement* games. Ajibade and
Ndububa (2008) indicate that games involving competition and those organized by rules were
deemed most enjoyable due to the collaborative nature and successful learning responses. For
example, when playing *Contraction Concentration* the week of May 9th, Felicity was observed as
being engaged and excited (See Appendix K). She willingly helped her peers throughout the
game and appeared to be interested in sharing her learning.

After looking at the authentic pieces produced by participants (i.e. writing samples and
guided reading field notes), I can infer that students who were highly engaged in phonics games
typically displayed their learning through real reading and writing. For example, the most
popular phonics game played was: *Follow the Path Contractions* (played during the Week of
May 6, 2013 as well as June 10, 2013). Students were focused, having fun, communicating,
sharing ideas, and engaged in this game more than the other Pinnell and Fountas games. When
asked to point out contractions, create contractions, or read and write contractions throughout the
rest of the study, the students who were most engaged, were able to do so the majority of the
time. Research indicates that fostered in meaningful ways, play facilitates literacy acquisition,
allows young children to practice and apply literacy skills, and promotes cognitive development.
crucial to learning to read and write (Pickett, 2005). The participants were motivated, engaged, and grasping the phonics skills due to them being presented in the form of a game.

The only participant not as engaged in a social setting was Luke – who often struggled with social settings in general, due to possibly being on the Autism spectrum. He thrived during independent activities and often did not know how to communicate with others when collaborating. Luke was not as interested in *Follow the Path: Contractions* (Week of May 6, 2013) as the other participants; therefore, he had trouble when asked to create contractions from a set of two words.

The only game in which Luke was observed as being engaged, focused, and excited to play was *Syllable Search* (Week of June 3, 2013). Interestingly enough, *Syllable Search* still was ranked as “high quality” in the Interest/engagement category; however, through my own observations, I saw a difference in the level of excitement when playing the other three “high quality” games versus *Syllable Search*. Participants appeared to enjoy the competition portion of the game; however, they were not allowed to work with anyone, which was not as exciting for them. Liu (2008) suggests that, “Play takes an important role in children’s learning and development as it gives learners intrinsic motivation, and personally relevant, meaningful experiences” (p. 20). With that being said, Luke was the most engaged during *Syllable Search* possibly for the same reason that the others were not as excited. Luke tended to thrive during independent activities and this game was no different.

The notion of students learning from one another in a social context is not a foreign one. There has been much research on students communicating, playing, and working together to make meaning. Several of the Pinnell and Fountas (2003) phonics games support a sociocultural theory of literacy in which “literacy is defined not just as the multifaceted act of reading,
writing, and thinking, but as constructing meaning from printed text within a sociocultural context” (Perez & McCarty, 2004, p. 4, as cited in Liu, 2008, p. 36). In my classroom, I saw a big difference in the way phonics was taught between independent work, and collaborative, as well as competitive, games. Students were more engaged and interested in the social nature of the games, which in turn, helped them learn the skills better. Studies show that phonics instruction through games not only promotes positive learning experiences through motivation and interest, but also fosters reading and writing development in young children (Ajibade & Ndububa, 2008; Boucher, 1994; Kowalyk & Deacon, 2007; Pickett, 2005). If the phonics skills were taught in a direct manner, rather than through a series of games, I do not believe that students would have been as successful as they were in authentic application.

In order to be successful, students must practice phonics skills in the context of real reading and writing

Another trend noticed after careful analysis of data was that four out of the five phonics games were deemed “fair” under the heading of: Linking word solving to meaning and structure. As discussed in Chapter Four of this study, proficient readers use all three cues to read with understanding and meaning. The majority of the phonics skills taught in the Pinnell and Fountas Phonics Bundle – Grade 1 games allowed students to practice them in isolation. Students did not have as many opportunities to apply the learned skills in the context of real reading and writing, unless given the opportunity to do so in other areas throughout the school day. Research indicates that educators have had numerous battles on whether teaching foundational skills in isolation based on letter sounds and phonetic pairings is better than having students decode words in context using a whole language approach (Brooks & Brooks, 2005; Dahl & Scharer,
While the argument still exists in some areas of education, research suggests that there may be a solution by combining both methods in a balanced approach (Brooks & Brooks, 2005; Moustafa, 1997; Raven, 1997; Taylor, 1997; Wilde, 1997).

While the actual skills chosen by Pinnell and Fountas for their phonics games were skills that developing readers and writers should learn, the way in which the skills were presented allowed isolated, systematic practice. For example, during the Week of May 27, 2013, participants played *Singular/Plural Go Fish* after listening to a mini-lesson about adding “-s” to certain base words in order to make them plural. While students were instructed in an authentic way (by my teaching through the context of real reading, followed by writing a few sentences using singular and plural forms of nouns), the actual game tied to the lesson only gave students an opportunity to practice the skill in an isolated manner. Participants practiced the difference between singular and plural nouns by playing the popular card game, *Go Fish*. If partner A had a card that said: *hat*, s/he would have to ask his/her partner if s/he had: *hats*. The cards would be matched up in this manner until all were gone. The player with the most matches wins.

Although this game was highly engaging and connected print and oral literacies, the words on the cards were not presented in the context of an authentic reading experience. In a whole language approach, students would have an opportunity to practice the newly acquired skill in real reading and writing situations. Whole language encourages students to decode words within context – using semantic (meaning), syntactic (structure), and graphophonemic (visual) cues as guides. While the games did not provide this type of instruction, I was able to supplement the participants’ learning throughout the school day with storybooks, writing prompts, and more. This approach immerses students in authentic reading and writing experiences and teaches basic
skills through skillfully planned, teachable moments as they occur in context (Manning & Kamii, 2000; Taylor, 1997).

With that being said, there were some disconnects between students applying learned skills in their reading and writing, and practicing them in isolation. Most students were able to practice the skill effectively in isolation for some activities (for example, play Singular/Plural Go Fish successfully) and unsuccessfully in others (for example, the singular/plural assignment as represented in Appendix O). These data were confusing because one would think that students would be more successful either practicing in an authentic manner or a systematic one – not randomly systematic and randomly authentic.

One reason behind why students may have been more successful one week than another regarding practicing their skills (in either a systematic or contextual way) may be my method of teaching the phonics skill. Without consciously knowing it, I may have embedded the skills more often throughout the school week in other content areas, rather than simply during small group instruction. Students would be more successful in general knowledge of the skill (isolated or otherwise) the more times exposed to it.

As discussed in Chapter Four, my own method of teaching did not reflect a strictly isolated manner or a completely contextual one. I taught phonics in a systematic, intentional way during small group work; however, I also included phonics skills throughout the school day with context-driven lessons (Willows, 2008). Students learn best from an educator who is in tune with what they need, and from an educator who knows how to best deliver it (Taylor, 1997). I knew that students needed real, authentic application of the phonics skills rather than simply playing the games.
**Students are able to recognize phonics skills in the context of real reading and writing**

Finally, a trend I noticed across the participant group was the fact that students were able to locate phonics skills within the context of reading or writing. However, the fact that they were able to do this is partly due to my teaching through authentic literacy experiences. Similar to the previous trend, this inclination shows that students who practice skills in isolation (which the majority of the Pinnell and Fountas Phonics Bundle – Grade 1 games allowed for) are able to locate them in authentic literacy experiences, when also provided opportunities to work within these types of experiences. The data collected that supports this notion stems from field notes both during game-play, as well as guided reading. Student interviews also support the idea of students being able to locate and recognize the phonics skills learned throughout this study.

For example, in Ryan’s interview (May 21, 2013) when asked “When you read or write, do you ever think about one of the games we have played in order to help you decode or spell a word?” he expressed that he “Remembers the same words from the board [Follow the Path] in his books” (Appendix M). Because Ryan was able to express this to me, it was an indication that he is thinking about the skills taught in real reading situations, even if I have not prompted him. Ryan is able to recognize specific skills (in this case, contractions) when reading. Ryan was often able to create contractions in his writing, as well as read them in the context of authentic text.

Luke was another participant who helped support the trend of recognizing phonics skills in contextual situations. During a guided reading group, Luke was asked to locate all of the contractions in his text when he finished reading. He was given a sticky note and a pencil, and without assistance, created the following list: can’t, won’t, shouldn’t don’t, and aren’t (See Figure 31 in Chapter Four). While Luke was able to locate and extract the contractions from the
text, this understanding of contractions was contradicted when Luke later on attempted to complete an independent contraction activity. Again, this is an example of “confusing data” in which students were able to locate a phonics skill in isolation in one instance, however were unable to do so in another. This could be due to my own teaching of the phonics skills, or because Luke was searching in the context of real reading (guided reading book) versus in a more isolated manner on a worksheet. He was developing this skill – which is expected for all students learning a new concept.

As a teacher, it is crucial that my instructional methods evolve and strengthen depending on the topic I am teaching, as well as the needs of my students. Creating phonics lessons were no different, and in looking across participant data, I could see that the “confusing data” may have indicated a lapse in my teaching. Stahl (1992) identified the following nine guidelines to high quality phonics:

1) Builds on a child’s rich concepts about how print functions; 2) Builds on a foundation of phonemic awareness; 3) Is clear and direct; 4) Is integrated into a total reading program; 5) Focuses on reading words, not learning rules; 6) May include onsets and rimes; 7) May include invented spelling practice; 8) Develops independent word recognition strategies, focusing attention on the internal structure of words; and 9) Develops automatic word recognition skills so that students can devote their attention to comprehension, not words (pgs. 620-624).

While I strove to achieve all of the goals Stahl (1992) indicated, I am certain that I did not master all nine for each of the five phonics games. Because of this, I can infer that some of the participants were more successful with certain games than others, as well as on a whole, the participant group may have been more successful on particular weeks than others. Regardless,
Stahl (1992) clearly indicates a need to teach phonics through authentic reading and writing experiences, while also leaving room to teach skills directly, which was how I went about teaching phonics in my classroom.

The role of phonics within a balanced literacy program is one that has been grappled with. The results of this study suggest that phonics is a crucial part of a literacy program, and should be taught both systematically and contextually. According to Wilde (1997), the role of phonics is minimal in this process – not directly taught using “rules,” yet induced through real reading and learning of new words. Though much of a readers’ knowledge about words and phonics emerges through reading, Wilde (1997) states that it still makes sense to include a limited amount of a more formal instruction, in a way that works inductively from what children already know. This combined approach is what I used throughout the study – the mini-lessons and authentic reading and writing activities embedded throughout the school week reinforced the systematic practice that the Pinnell and Fountas phonics games provided.

Implications for Student Learning

The results of this study denote several implications for student learning. After working with the participant group throughout the school year, while specifically examining their acquisition of phonics skills through a closer lens during this study, I can suggest that students should be given opportunities to work both collaboratively and competitively. According to this study, students are more motivated, engaged, and interested in their learning when working together to complete a task, and/or competing against each other in a playful nature. By working together, students are developing literacy identities – negotiating the materials at their own
developmental stages, partaking in social interactions and applying learning through practice (Pickett, 2005).

Second, students should be given the opportunity to play games as a route to literacy learning. In this study, I noticed that the majority of participants were engaged, having fun, and driven to learn new skills when playing phonics games. Research indicates that fostered in meaningful ways, play facilitates literacy acquisition, allows young children to practice and apply literacy skills, and promotes cognitive development crucial to learning to read and write (Pickett, 2005). If the phonics skills were only presented through direct instruction, I do not believe the participants would have been as successful when given the chance to apply them. Acquiring literacy skills through structured play appears to be a highly motivating way to engage students (Liu, 2008).

Another implication for student learning is to provide students with authentic opportunities to apply phonics skills. While it is beneficial to initially teach the phonics skill in a direct manner, the results from this study would suggest that students would retain understanding of the skill after practicing it in the context of real reading and writing. Phonics should be taught in a systematic, intentional way during small group work; however, skills should also be presented throughout the school day within context-driven lessons (Willows, 2008). This may occur during guided reading, shared reading, or writing tasks – not simply during small group, phonics instruction. Research supports that students need more opportunities other than playing the phonics games to gain familiarity with the phonics skills taught (Brooks & Brooks, 2005; Moustafa, 1997; Raven, 1997; Taylor, 1997; Wilde, 1997).

Finally, students should be presented with phonics skills in a manner that supports all three cuing systems used in reading. Whole language encourages students to decode words
within context – using semantic (meaning), syntactic (structure), and graphophonic (visual) cues as guides. This approach immerses students in authentic reading and writing experiences and teaches basic skills through skillfully planned, teachable moments as they occur in context (Manning & Kamii, 2000; Taylor, 1997). Several of the phonics games presented in this study lacked practice in meaning and structure. In order to help develop proficient readers and writers, one must provide students with opportunities to see, work with, and apply the phonics skill in all three areas.

**Implications for My Teaching**

Aside from student implications, this study helped provide me with strategies to enhance my own teaching. This study has benefited my career goals in that it has enlightened me to the importance of student social interaction through play and collaborative work. It also has shown me the importance of teaching skills within the context of real reading and writing, along with ensuring that students are taking part in literacy activities that support all three cues of proficient reading. The following sections will explain implications for my own teaching, as I have determined through analyzing the results from this study.

*Literacy skills may be acquired through social interaction in the form of collaboration or friendly competition*

As a teacher who always seeks out better methods of instruction, I will ensure that my students have opportunities to learn through social interaction in the form of collaborating, as well as through competition. When students collaborate, I notice that their engagement is higher, and knowing that they are able to create meaning together gives them a sense of purpose. I also
notice that when students compete in a playful way, often times they push themselves to do their best work and to succeed with whatever the task at hand is. Liu (2008) supports play in the context of gaming with rules (i.e. phonics games) when she states that, “engaging in games with rules develops children’s logical thinking and social controls and enables them to understand order in the world” (p. 32). Several of the Pinnell and Fountas (2003) phonics games support a socio-cultural theory of literacy in which “literacy is defined not just as the multifaceted act of reading, writing, and thinking, but as constructing meaning from printed text within a sociocultural context” (Perez & McCarty, 2004, p. 4, as cited in Liu, 2008, p. 36). By keeping this social aspect of learning in mind when planning, I will be providing my students with opportunities to learn from one another and expand their own knowledge.

**Literacy games are an engaging way to teach important skills**

While it is still important to analyze the actual games being used, games are an engaging and fun way for students to learn foundational literacy skills. Liu (2008) reports “learning through structured and spontaneous play is the springboard into the curriculum” (Cox & Sanders, 1994, p. 167 as cited in Liu, 2008, p. 20). As a teacher, I plan to examine the games I choose prior to implementing them; however, if the games are quality, I know that students will be more likely to learn the skill at hand because they will feel like they are simply “playing.” Liu (2008) also suggests, “Play takes an important role in children’s learning and development as it gives learners intrinsic motivation, and personally relevant, meaningful experiences” (p. 20). This study helped show me the benefits of using games in the classroom. The more interested the students were in the phonics game, the higher their success rates when applying new learning.
Phonics skills should be taught using all three language cuing systems

As a teacher of reading, I will strive to expose my students to use of phonics skills in the context of real reading and writing. By doing so, they will experience the skill in a deeper way, paying attention to the meaning, structure, and the visual way that the skill appears in text. According to Wilde (1997), the role of phonics is minimal in a whole language process – not directly taught using “rules,” yet induced through real reading and learning of new words. Though much of a readers’ knowledge about words and phonics emerges through reading, Wilde (1997) states that it still makes sense to include a limited amount of a more formal instruction, in a way that works inductively from what children already know. This study helped open my eyes to the notion that not all phonics activities support meaning and structure along with the visual cue of reading. It is my goal to create proficient readers and writers – this can only happen when students understand and use all three cues of reading: semantic (meaning), syntactic (structure), and graphophonic (visual).

Phonics skills should be reinforced throughout the school day, across all content areas

The results of this study helped confirm my belief that literacy skills should be taught throughout the school day – not just during a reading or writing block of time. While the phonics skills taught in this study took place during small group instruction within my English Language Arts block, the skills were reinforced throughout the school day. Students should experience the skill in authentic ways such as during a read aloud, writing in science or social studies, and morning work. Students learn best from an educator who is in-tune with what they need, and from an educator who knows how to best deliver it (Taylor, 1997).
Recommendations for Future Research

The results of this study indicate that the Pinnell and Fountas Phonics Bundle – Grade 1 (2003) contain games that are highly engaging, yet only allow for practice in systematic ways. Because of this result, further research should be conducted in order to determine how to supplement phonics instruction with other methods, in addition to using phonics games. Additional research would be beneficial to determine the best methods of phonics instruction.

What types of authentic literacy activities help support systematic phonics instruction?

This study examined a specific set of phonics games provided through the Pinnell and Fountas Phonics Bundle – Grade 1 (2003). The study aimed to measure how effective the games are in terms of helping students acquire necessary phonics skills for proficient reading. While the actual phonics game proved to be engaging and purposeful in many ways, most of the games lacked real application to reading and writing. As the teacher researcher, I supplemented my students’ learning with other authentic activities in order to provide them with quality instruction.

With that being said, further research is needed in order to gather information on what kinds of supplemental activities are considered high quality. With the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards, best practice is evolving. Modern, appropriate curriculum is changing with it as well. The complexity and types of materials used should reflect the most current standards and practices. Because the Common Core Learning Standards are a fairly new practice, there is not enough research yet to determine the kinds of activities and materials that should be used in a successful balanced literacy program.
In my classroom, I used read aloud, guided reading, writing prompts, and morning work as venues to enhance the skill learned in small group phonics stations. Participants learned a phonics skill through a mini-lesson – which often included an example of the skill within authentic text. The skill was reinforced through Pinnell and Fountas phonics games, followed by me providing additional support throughout other content areas.

Although I created my own methods of supplemental instruction to teach phonics (other than the phonics games), these actions were based on my own knowledge of how children learn, as well as what types of activities are meaningful and purposeful. While I followed the Common Core Learning Standards, as well as district curriculum, the materials I used were chosen based on student interest, ability levels, and application to the skill being taught. Further research is needed to determine what rigorous, multifaceted activities (i.e. read aloud, guided reading, writing prompts…) are most beneficial to students learning to read in conjunction to learning phonics skills through the new Common Core Learning Standards.

What is the best way to group students when teaching phonics?

While I chose to complete this study using a small group of participants, further research is needed in order to determine which method of grouping students yields the most rewarding results. I chose to teach phonics using small groups of students within my English Language Arts (ELA) block. When I was meeting with a group, the other students were working on a multitude of things as structured through the Daily 5 model. The groups rotated regularly, so that each group received phonics instruction and 1:1 time with me. Sometimes the small groups were created depending on reading levels, other times they were created at random. The way small groups are differentiated would be a call for future research as well.
Although this method of instruction worked for my class and the objectives I wanted my students to reach, phonics could also be taught in a whole group setting. Further research is needed in order to determine which environment supports student learning of phonics. The majority of the contextual phonics instruction was taught in the setting of whole group within my classroom. This took place during morning meeting, read aloud, shared reading, and modeled writing. I used a balance between small and whole group instruction, yet research could be conducted to determine if one method is superior to the other.

**What factor does a child’s age play in learning and applying phonics skills?**

The ages of the participants in this study ranged from six to seven years old. Because I conducted the study within my own classroom, I was not able to test the phonics games with students of other ages. Further research in this area would benefit the educational field greatly. Educators are constantly reflecting at attempting to improve their own craft. While early childhood educators understand that phonics is a necessary part of a balanced literacy program, the question of when to stop teaching phonics is still “on the table.”

As discussed in chapter two of this study, there are differing schools of thought as to when to teach phonics skills to developing readers (Brooks & Brooks, 2005; Moustafa, 1997; Raven, 1997; Taylor, 1997; Wilde, 1997). First grade was a perfect environment to teach phonics skills because the entire class was learning to read with fluency and comprehension. Further research would help shed light on this subject and allow educators to either continue teaching phonics, begin teaching phonics, or stop teaching phonics within the classroom. Research would help inform school districts as to what types of professional development and
training would be beneficial to teachers who are struggling to incorporate phonics in their classrooms.

**Final Thoughts**

As New York State continues to unveil assessments, new protocol, and more complex curriculum, it is necessary to take a step back and think about how children learn best. As a teacher, I see my students light up with motivation and eagerness to succeed when playing an educational game. This study, along with past research, suggests that students who play phonics games as a route to literacy learning benefit from the social aspect of the activity. The first grade participants of this study benefited from practicing the phonics skills within the context of authentic reading and writing experiences. This study also presented the notion that students were able to locate specific phonics skills within the context of real reading/writing, although when prompted to determine the skills in isolation using other methods, they were not as successful.

After reflecting upon the results of the study, there were several implications for student and teacher learning/instruction. Students should be given opportunities to collaborate with one another in the classroom in order to achieve a goal. Playful competition is another way to gain student motivation, ultimately yielding successful results. Teachers must consider all three cues of the reading process when planning meaningful phonics lessons. While the Pinnell and Fountas Phonics Bundle – Grade 1 (2003) supported *some* of the cues, the majority of the games analyzed did not represent all three cues simultaneously. This study helped reinforce the notion that phonics instruction is a vital aspect of a balanced literacy program, and can be taught in fun, engaging ways that provide students with purposeful learning opportunities.
References


http://www.cast.org/udl/


Appendix A

Observation Protocol

Participant Pseudonym: ________________________
Observation Date and Time:_____________________________________
Length of Observation: _________________________________________

Phonics Instruction with *Pinnell and Fountas Phonics Bundle – Grade One* (2003)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Activities (teacher and student)</th>
<th>Reflective Field Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Appendix B**

**Instructional Phonics Game Rubric**

**Game/Lesson: ______________________________**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>High Quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interest/Engagement</strong></td>
<td>Students are not engaged nor interested in the game. Students appear to be bored, do not understand the concept, or are indifferent.</td>
<td>Students are mildly engaged or interested in the game. Students may be indifferent, but are putting forth some effort.</td>
<td>Students are engaged in the game. Students are active learners and are working hard to apply newly learned skills. Students appear to be having fun.</td>
<td>Students are engaged and interested in the game. Students are active learners, connecting old phonics skills to new. Students appear to be having fun and are excited about playing the game.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Links word solving to meaning and structure</strong></td>
<td>The game presents the phonics skill in isolation. Students are expected to practice in a decontextualized way. There is no clear link to the other two reading cues.</td>
<td>The game presents the phonics skill with some mention or application of meaning and/or structure. All three cues are not represented, nor applied.</td>
<td>The game presents the phonics skill with practice using one more cue of reading. The game stimulates word solving with either making meaning or understanding structure.</td>
<td>The game presents the phonics skill with practice using all three cues of reading. The game stimulates word solving with making meaning and understanding structure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Promotes automatic word recognition skills</strong></td>
<td>The game does not promote automatic word recognition skills. The game requires students to think deeply and for an extended period of time before decoding a word.</td>
<td>The game may have aspects of “on the run” recognition skills, but does not consistently encourage students to link skills together for faster decoding.</td>
<td>The game promotes automatic word recognition skills. Students are expected to practice the game at a steady pace.</td>
<td>The game promotes automatic word recognition skills. Students are expected to practice the game at a quick pace (“on the run”), in order to focus on meaning making.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Connection to oral and print literacies</strong></td>
<td>The game does not link speaking or printing literacies with the intended skill. Students experience the phonics skill in one context only</td>
<td>The game may promote speaking and printing literacies, but still relies on decontextualized practice. Students do not see a clear connection across literacies.</td>
<td>The game promotes either speaking or printing literacies. Students clearly see how the learned phonics skill applies in speaking or printing situations.</td>
<td>The game promotes both speaking and printing literacies. Students clearly see and apply the learned phonics skill in both domains.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Combines past phonics instruction with new</strong></td>
<td>There are no clear links between past phonics skills taught and the new skill taught during the game. The only skill practiced is the newly introduced skill.</td>
<td>There are few links between past phonics skills taught and the new skill taught during the game. At least one other phonics skill is practiced during the game.</td>
<td>Several links are made between past phonics skills taught and the new skill taught during the game. At least two other phonics skills are practiced during the game.</td>
<td>There are clear links between past phonics instruction and new. Students act as flexible readers and are able to apply at least three other phonics skills to the new game.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the work of:
Appendix C

Interview Template

Participant Pseudonym: ________________________
Interview Date and Time:______________________________

Do you enjoy phonics stations? If yes, why? If no, why not?

Is there a particular phonics game you prefer playing? Why?

Why do you think phonics is important?

Do you feel like phonics games help you learn to read or write? If yes, how?

When you read or write, do you ever think about one of the games we have played in order to help you decode or spell a word? Which game(s)?
Appendix D

Contraction Concentration Phonics Rubric
Week of May 6, 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>High Quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interest/Engagement</strong></td>
<td>Students are not engaged nor interested in the game. Students appear to be bored, do not understand the concept, or are indifferent.</td>
<td>Students are mildly engaged or interested in the game. Students may be indifferent, but are putting forth some effort.</td>
<td>Students are engaged in the game. Students are active learners and are working hard to apply newly learned skills. Students appear to be having fun.</td>
<td>Students are engaged and interested in the game. Students are active learners, connecting old phonics skills to new. Students appear to be having fun and are excited about playing the game.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Links word solving to meaning and structure</strong></td>
<td>The game presents the phonics skill in isolation. Students are expected to practice in a decontextualized way. There is no clear link to the other two reading cues.</td>
<td>The game presents the phonics skill with some mention or application of meaning and/or structure. All three cues are not represented, nor applied.</td>
<td>The game presents the phonics skill with practice using one more cue of reading. The game stimulates word solving with other making meaning or understanding structure.</td>
<td>The game presents the phonics skill with practice using all three cues of reading. The game stimulates word solving with making meaning and understanding structure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Promotes automatic word recognition skills</strong></td>
<td>The game does not promote automatic word recognition skills. The game requires students to think deeply and for an extended period of time before decoding a word.</td>
<td>The game may have aspects of &quot;on the run&quot; recognition skills, but does not consistently encourage students to link skills together for faster decoding.</td>
<td>The game promotes automatic word recognition skills. Students are expected to practice the game at a steady pace.</td>
<td>The game promotes automatic word recognition skills. Students are expected to practice the game at a quick pace (&quot;on the run&quot;), in order to focus on meaning making.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Connection to oral and print literacies</strong></td>
<td>The game does not link speaking or printing literacies with the intended skill. Students experience the phonics skill in one context only.</td>
<td>The game may promote speaking and printing literacies, but still relies on decontextualized practice. Students do not see a clear connection across literacies.</td>
<td>The game promotes both speaking and printing literacies. Students clearly see how the learned phonics skill applies in speaking or printing situations.</td>
<td>The game promotes both speaking and printing literacies. Students clearly see and apply the learned phonics skill in both domains.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Combines past phonics instruction with new</strong></td>
<td>There are no clear links between past phonics skills taught and the new skill taught during the game. The only skill practiced is the newly introduced skill.</td>
<td>There are few links between past phonics skills taught and the new skill taught during the game. At least one other phonics skill is practiced during the game.</td>
<td>Several links are made between past phonics skills taught and the new skill taught during the game. At least two other phonics skills are practiced during the game.</td>
<td>There are clear links between past phonics instruction and new. Students act as flexible readers and are able to apply at least three other phonics skills to the new game.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix E

**Follow the Path: Contractions Phonics Rubric**

**Week of May 13, 2013**

#### Instructional Phonics Game Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Game/Lesson: Follow the Path: Contractions</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>High Quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interest/Engagement</strong></td>
<td>Students are not engaged nor interested in the game. Students appear to be bored, do not understand the concept, or are indifferent.</td>
<td>Students are mildly engaged or interested in the game. Students may be indifferent, but are putting forth some effort.</td>
<td>Students are engaged in the game. Students are active learners and are working hard to apply newly learned skills. Students appear to be having fun.</td>
<td>Students are engaged and interested in the game. Students are active learners, connecting old phonics skills to new. Students appear to be having fun and are excited about playing the game.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Links word solving to meaning and structure</strong></td>
<td>The game presents the phonics skill in isolation. Students are expected to practice in a decostaonialized way. There is no clear link to the other two reading cues.</td>
<td>The game presents the phonics skill with some mention or application of meaning and/or structure. All three cues are not represented, nor applied.</td>
<td>The game presents the phonics skill with practice using one more cue of reading. The game stimulates word solving with either making meaning or understanding structure.</td>
<td>The game presents the phonics skill with practice using all three cues of reading. The game stimulates word solving with making meaning and understanding structure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Promotes automatic word recognition skills</strong></td>
<td>The game does not promote automatic word recognition skills. The game requires students to think deeply and for an extended period of time before decoding a word.</td>
<td>The game may have aspects of &quot;on the run&quot; recognition skills, but does not consistently encourage students to link skills together for faster decoding.</td>
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<td>The game promotes automatic word recognition skills. Students are expected to practice the game at a quick pace (&quot;on the run&quot;), in order to focus on meaning making.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Connection to oral and print literacies</strong></td>
<td>The game does not link speaking or printing literacies with the intended skill. Students experience the phonics skill in one context only</td>
<td>The game may promote speaking and printing literacies, but still relies on decontextualized practice. Students do not see a clear connection across literacies.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Combines past phonics instruction with new</strong></td>
<td>There are no clear links between past phonics skills taught and the new skill taught during the game. The only skill practiced is the newly introduced skill.</td>
<td>There are few links between past phonics skills taught and the new skill taught during the game. At least one other phonics skill is practiced during the game.</td>
<td>Several links are made between past phonics skills taught and the new skill taught during the game. At least two other phonics skills are practiced during the game.</td>
<td>There are clear links between past phonics instruction and new. Students act as flexible readers and are able to apply at least three other phonics skills to the new game.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Based on the work of: Pinell and Fountas (2003), Morrow & Tracey (1997), Kowalyk & Deacon (2007), and Stahl (1992).*

Week of May 13
## Appendix F

### Mystery Sort Phonics Rubric
**Week of May 20, 2013**

**Instructional Phonics Game Rubric**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Game/Lesson:</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>High Quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interest/Engagement</strong></td>
<td>Students are not engaged nor interested in the game. Students appear to be bored, do not understand the concept, or are indifferent.</td>
<td>Students are mildly engaged or interested in the game. Students may be indifferent, but are putting forth some effort.</td>
<td>Students are engaged in the game. Students are active learners and are working hard to apply newly learned skills. Students appear to be having fun.</td>
<td>Students are engaged and interested in the game. Students are active learners, connecting old phonics skills to new. Students appear to be having fun and are excited about playing the game.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Links word solving to meaning and structure</strong></td>
<td>The game presents the phonics skill in isolation. Students are expected to practice in a decontextualized way. There is no clear link to the other two reading cues.</td>
<td>The game presents the phonics skill with some mention or application of meaning and/or structure. All three cues are not represented, nor applied.</td>
<td>The game presents the phonics skill with practice using one more cue of reading. The game stimulates word solving with either making meaning or understanding structure.</td>
<td>The game presents the phonics skill with practice using all three cues of reading. The game stimulates word solving with making meaning and understanding structure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Promotes automatic word recognition skills</strong></td>
<td>The game does not promote automatic word recognition skills. The game requires students to think deeply and for an extended period of time before decoding a word.</td>
<td>The game may have aspects of “on the run” recognition skills, but does not consistently encourage students to link skills together for faster decoding.</td>
<td>The game promotes automatic word recognition skills. Students are expected to practice the game at a steady pace.</td>
<td>The game promotes automatic word recognition skills. Students are expected to practice the game at a quick pace (“on the run”), in order to focus on meaning making.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Connection to oral and print literacies</strong></td>
<td>The game does not link speaking or printing literacies with the intended skill. Students experience the phonics skill in one context only</td>
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<td>There are clear links between past phonics instruction and new. Students act as flexible readers and are able to apply at least three other phonics skills to the new game.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Based on the work of: Pinnell and Fountas (2003), Morrow & Tracey (2007), Kowalik & Deacon (2007), and Stahl (1992).*

---

*Week of May 20*
Appendix G

Singular/Plural Go Fish Phonics Rubric
Week of May 27, 2013

### Instructional Phonics Game Rubric

**Game/Lesson:** Singular/Plural Go Fish

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interest/Engagement</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>High Quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students are not engaged nor interested in the game. Students</td>
<td>Students are mildly engaged or interested in the game. Students</td>
<td>Students are engaged in the game. Students are active learners and</td>
<td>Students are engaged and interested in the game. Students are active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>appear to be bored, do not understand the concept, or are</td>
<td>may be indifferent, but are putting forth some effort.</td>
<td>are working hard to apply newly learned skills. Students appear to</td>
<td>learners and connecting old phonics skills to new. Students appear to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>indifferent.</td>
<td></td>
<td>to be having fun.</td>
<td>be having fun and are excited about playing the game.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Links word solving to       | The game presents the phonics skill in isolation. Students are      | The game presents the phonics skill with some mention or application| The game presents the phonics skill with practice using one more       | The game presents the phonics skill with practice using all three        |
| meaning and structure       | expected to practice in a decontextualized way. There is no clear    | of meaning and/or structure. All three cues are not                 | cue of reading. The game stimulates word solving with other making      | cue of reading. The game stimulates word solving with making meaning and  |
|                             | link to the other two reading cues.                                  | represented, nor applied.                                            | meaning or understanding structure.                                     | understanding structure.                                                 |

| Promotes automatic           | The game may have aspects of "on the run" recognition skills, but    | The game promotes automatic word recognition skills. Students       | The game promotes automatic word recognition skills. Students           | The game promotes automatic word recognition skills. Students           |
| word recognition skills      | does not consistently encourage students to link skills together     | are expected to practice the game at a steady pace.                 | are expected to practice the game at a quick pace ("on the run"), in   | are expected to practice the game at a quick pace ("on the run"), in   |
|                             | for faster decoding.                                                 |                                                                      | order to focus on meaning making.                                       | order to focus on meaning making.                                        |

| Connection to oral and      | The game does not link speaking or printing literacies with the      | The game may promote speaking and printing literacies, but still    | The game promotes either speaking or printing literacies. Students     | The game promotes both speaking and printing literacies. Students     |
| print literacies            | intended skill. Students experience the phonics skill in one context only | relies on decontextualized practice. Students do not see a clear     | clearly see how the learned phonics skill applies in speaking or        | clearly see and apply the learned phonics skill in both domains.       |
|                             |                                                                      | connection across literacies.                                        | printing situations.                                                   |                                                                           |

| Combines past phonics       | There are no clear links between past phonics skills taught and the  | There are few links between past phonics skills taught and the new   | Several links are made between past phonics skills taught and the new   | There are clear links between past phonics instruction and new.         |
| instruction with new        | new skill taught during the game. The only skill practiced is the    | new skill taught during the game. At least one other phonics skill   | new skill taught during the game. At least two other phonics skills    | Students act as flexible readers and are able to apply at least three   |
|                             | newly introduced skill.                                              | is practiced during the game.                                        | are practiced during the game.                                         | other phonics skills to the new game.                                   |

---

For the week of May 27, 2013.
# Appendix H

## Syllable Search Phonics Rubric

**Week of June 3, 2013**

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### Instructional Phonics Game Rubric

**Game/Lesson:** Syllable Search

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>High Quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interest/Engagement</strong></td>
<td>Students are not engaged nor interested in the game. Students appear to be bored, do not understand the concept, or are indifferent.</td>
<td>Students are mildly engaged or interested in the game. Students may be indifferent but are putting forth some effort.</td>
<td>Students are engaged in the game. Students are active learners and are working hard to apply newly learned skills. Students appear to be having fun.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Links word solving to meaning and structure</strong></td>
<td>The game presents the phonics skill in isolation. Students are expected to practice in a decontextualized way. There is no clear link to the other two reading cues.</td>
<td>The game presents the phonics skill with some mention or application of meaning and/or structure. All three cues are not represented, nor applied.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>The game may have aspects of &quot;on the run&quot; recognition skills, but does not consistently encourage students to link skills together for faster decoding.</td>
<td>The game promotes automatic word recognition skills. Students are expected to practice the game at a steady pace.</td>
<td>The game promotes automatic word recognition skills. Students are expected to practice the game at a steady pace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>The game does not link speaking or printing literacies with the intended skill. Students experience the phonics skill in one context only.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>There are no clear links between past phonics skills taught and the new skill taught during the game. The only skill practiced is the newly introduced skill.</td>
<td>There are few links between past phonics skills taught and the new skill taught during the game. At least one other phonics skill is practiced during the game.</td>
<td>Several links are made between past phonics skills taught and the new skill taught during the game. At least two other phonics skills are practiced during the game.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

Appendix I

Follow the Path Game Board
# Appendix J

**Running Record Template**

---

**RUNNING RECORD SHEET**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text Titles</th>
<th>Errors</th>
<th>Error Ratio</th>
<th>Accuracy Rate</th>
<th>Self-correction Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Easy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Directional movement**

---

**Analysis of Errors and Self-corrections**

Information used or neglected (Meaning (M), Structure or Syntax (S), Visual (V))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Easy</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Cross-checking on Information** (Note that this behaviour changes over time)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Analysis of Errors and Self-corrections**

---

---
Appendix K
Observation Notes: Game Play

Observation Protocol

Participant Pseudonym: **RYAN**
Observation Date and Time: 5/9
Length of Observation: **25 min.**

Phonics Instruction with *Pinnell and Fountas Phonics Bundle – Grade One* (2003)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Activities (teacher and student)</th>
<th>Reflective Field Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>turned over 2 sets of cards</td>
<td><strong>Ryan</strong> knew that <em>v</em> contractions have apostrophes. He only picked up the &quot;broken&quot; version.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- you are</td>
<td><strong>Ryan</strong> knew that <em>v</em> contractions have apostrophes. He only picked up the &quot;broken&quot; version.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- did not</td>
<td><strong>Ryan</strong> knew that <em>v</em> contractions have apostrophes. He only picked up the &quot;broken&quot; version.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>&quot;I didn't even get a contraction.&quot;</strong></td>
<td><strong>Ryan</strong> knew that <em>v</em> contractions have apostrophes. He only picked up the &quot;broken&quot; version.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Picked up &quot;I'll&quot; and asked &quot;What am I looking for?&quot;</strong></td>
<td>Initially, did not know what to look for. Later on, made the connection. Quick learner!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>↓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>later, someone picked up &quot;I will&quot; and he remembered it was &quot;I'll&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Observation Protocol

Participant Pseudonym: Felicity
Observation Date and Time: 5/19
Length of Observation: 25 min.

Phonics Instruction with Pinnell and Fountas Phonics Bundle – Grade One (2003)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Activities (teacher and student)</th>
<th>Reflective Field Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Found &quot;you are&quot; and &quot;you're&quot;</td>
<td>• Quick, automatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Excited</td>
<td>• Engaged and helped others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• is not and (isn't)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Observation Protocol

Participant Pseudonym: Max
Observation Date and Time: 5/9
Length of Observation: 25 min.

Phonics Instruction with Pinnell and Fountas Phonics Bundle – Grade One (2003)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Activities (teacher and student)</th>
<th>Reflective Field Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Picked up &quot;I am&quot;</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• &quot;What would you be looking for?&quot; (R) &quot;I'm&quot; Max</td>
<td>Knows the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Turned over &quot;don't&quot; and said is looking for &quot;do not&quot;</td>
<td>contraction pairing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>for broken-down word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>quick, automatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan corrected her and said she is looking for &quot;do not&quot;</td>
<td>maybe too</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>rushed and makes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mistakes?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Observation Protocol

**Participant Pseudonym:** Penny  
**Observation Date and Time:** 5/9/1  
**Length of Observation:** 25 min.

**Phonics Instruction with Pinnell and Fountas Phonics Bundle – Grade One (2003)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Activities (teacher and student)</th>
<th>Reflective Field Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• smiling, excited</td>
<td>was able to help others. knows contractions on her own</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• good sport</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• gave hints for matches and knew many contractions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Observation Protocol**

Participant Pseudonym: **Penny**
Observation Date and Time: **5/13**
Length of Observation: **30 min. - Guided Reading**

Phonics Instruction with *Pinneil and Fountas Phonics Bundle - Grade One* (2003)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Activities (teacher and student)</th>
<th>Reflective Field Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Me</em> &quot;Can you find any contractions?&quot;</td>
<td>(\rightarrow) Connection to Star student papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Penny</em> Owl's / &quot;He owns something&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they're (\rightarrow) they are</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>can't (\rightarrow) can not</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>don't (\rightarrow) do not</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was easily able to find and use contractions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could interchange one word or two words to make sense.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Observation Protocol

Participant Pseudonym: Max  
Observation Date and Time: 5/21/13  
Length of Observation: 30 min. 9:00

Phonics Instruction with Pinnell and Fountas Phonics Bundle – Grade One (2003)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Activities (teacher and student)</th>
<th>Reflective Field Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clearly understood game</td>
<td>understands word patterns &amp; sounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful sorting with partner</td>
<td>link to old phonics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>made contractions!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"mystery sort"
**Observation Protocol**

Participant Pseudonym: **Luke**
Observation Date and Time: **5/21/13**
Length of Observation: **30 min**

Phonics Instruction with *Pinnell and Fountas Phonics Bundle – Grade One* (2003)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Activities (teacher and student)</th>
<th>Reflective Field Notes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I am confused.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Put a heading down before his partner asked</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correctly guessed partners' sort &quot;H&quot; words</td>
<td>clarified before moving on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Created sort that doesn't make sense in it be i we</td>
<td>spoke to him about it ... he erased &quot;i&quot; and &quot;we&quot; and &quot;be&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Plural**

*Go Fish*

**Observation Protocol**

Participant Pseudonym: *Felicity*

Observation Date and Time: *5/24*

Length of Observation: *25 min.*

Phonics Instruction with *Pinnell and Fountas Phonics Bundle – Grade One* (2003)

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<th>Description of Activities (teacher and student)</th>
<th>Reflective Field Notes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>· &quot;Oh! I love when we play Go Fish!&quot;</td>
<td>engaged, high interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Only needed me to give brief directions. Was ready to play before the rest of the group was ready.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Got tripped up on mouse → mice → geese</td>
<td>Not a typical &quot;s&quot; on the end. Have not explicitly taught this, but she knew it didn't sound right.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Fairly rapid with her play</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Observation Protocol

**Participant Pseudonym:** Luke  
**Observation Date and Time:** 6/13/13  
**Length of Observation:** 25' min.

**Phonics Instruction with Pinnell and Fountas Phonics Bundle – Grade One (2003)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Activities (teacher and student)</th>
<th>Reflective Field Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>· Extremely focused</td>
<td>→ knew he was being timed &amp; was competing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Did not leave my guided reading table. Used only words from the word wall.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Peaked at Ryan's paper to find a 4 syllable word</td>
<td>→ There were no 4 syllable words on the wall, but Luke did not want to give up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Tapped on the table to find the # of syllables.</td>
<td>→ Good strategy!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Syllable Scavenger Hunt**
* Group chose to play Follow the Path Contractions

**Observation Protocol**

- **Participant Pseudonym:** Penny
- **Observation Date and Time:** 6/10/13 25 min
- **Length of Observation:**

**Phonics Instruction with Pinnell and Fountas Phonics Bundle – Grade One (2003)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Activities (teacher and student)</th>
<th>Reflective Field Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Entire group was excited to play</td>
<td><em>Solid</em> retention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Did not want me to facilitate or remind them of how to play</td>
<td><em>High interest = more knowledge &amp; learning?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I noticed a huge improvement in Penny’s confidence the 2nd time playing this</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- She helped others with their cards – very sure of herself</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix L

Observation Notes: Guided Reading

- Penny
- fluid, confident
- enjoys book
- stuck on bodies
  - plural of body ✓
- loved pictures "cool!" can use them to decode words
- takes risks
Max

1. stuck on prize — long i, silent e rule ✓
2. flow picked up after that
3. confident
4. "win the prize" on the next page with ease — remembered word from previous page.
5. stuck on bodies — plural of body ✓
Anecdotal Notes

Guided reading

Week of 5/9

Ryan → So excited to notice contractions in reading! When others were silent reading, he blurted out that he found "Wouldn't" or "Would not." 😊

Luke → I gave Luke a sticky note after he finished the text and asked him to write down all of the contractions he could find. He came up with a good list.

Max → Accidentally interchanged "didn't" when the text read "doesn't." I corrected her and she said "Oh yeah!"
Anecdotal Notes
Guided reading
Week of 5/13

1. Luke asked if we would be searching for contractions again.

2. Felicity was fluent, good pace, got stuck on "through," thought it was thorough.

3. Penny found the text difficult — it was a level (C). She is the lowest in the group (but still in the "high group!"). However, I sent her on a contraction hunt and she found the following:

   wasn't
   shouldn't
   don't
   can't

   I asked her to "define" them & she was able to say:

   was not
   should not
   do not
   can not
Appendix M
Student Interviews

Interview Template

Participant Pseudonym: Penny
Interview Date and Time: 5/14-5/21/13

Do you enjoy phonics stations? If yes, why? If no, why not?
Yes — because it’s fun.

Is there a particular phonics game you prefer playing? Why?

Blends Go Fish
Follow the Path

b/c you get to do fun stuff and roll the dice.

Why do you think phonics is important?
Because you have to learn these games.

Do you feel like phonics games help you learn to read or write? If yes, how?

Sort of — b/c sometimes we write or sometimes we read when we do stations. I have used contractions in my writing.

When you read or write, do you ever think about one of the games we have played in order to help you decode or spell a word? Which game(s)?

Yes — contraction games

I think about them when I read.
Interview Template

Participant Pseudonym: Ryan
Interview Date and Time: 5/21/13 9:00 am

Do you enjoy phonics stations? If yes, why? If no, why not?
Yes—because of the games! Games are fun!

Is there a particular phonics game you prefer playing? Why?
The card and board games because I have a whole deck of cards at home.

Why do you think phonics is important?
It helps you learn—you need to play fairly.

Do you feel like phonics games help you learn to read or write? If yes, how?
I am good at reading. The games have helped me 'cuz I can read what it says on the board.

When you read or write, do you ever think about one of the games we have played in order to help you decode or spell a word? Which game(s)?
Yes—Follow the Path. Because I remember the same words from the board in my books.
Interview Template

Participant Pseudonym: Max
Interview Date and Time: 6/4/13

Do you enjoy phonics stations? If yes, why? If no, why not?
Yeah - they are usually fun. I love the card games.

Is there a particular phonics game you prefer playing? Why?
Go Fish - any version! I am good at it.

Why do you think phonics is important?
It helps us read better. I have learned new rules and things... like silent e.

Do you feel like phonics games help you learn to read or write? If yes, how?
Yes! I just said that! All of the rules help me.

When you read or write, do you ever think about one of the games we have played in order to help you decode or spell a word? Which game(s)?
Not really... well, maybe. But more like the things we practice. Like plurals or contractions.
Appendix N
Running Records

RUNNING RECORD SHEET

Name: **Ryan**
Date: **5/23**
D. of B.: __________ Age: __ yrs __ mths
School: **ACE**
Recorder: **Cardella**

Text Titles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Errors</th>
<th>Error Ratio</th>
<th>Accuracy Rate</th>
<th>Self-correction Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Easy</td>
<td>1:</td>
<td>___ % 1:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional</td>
<td>Fifty states, one</td>
<td>___ % 1:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard</td>
<td>1:</td>
<td>___ % 1:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Directional movement

Analysis of Errors and Self-corrections
Information used or neglected [Meaning (M), Structure or Syntax (S), Visual (V)]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Easy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neglected meaning &amp; structure</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hard</th>
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<tbody>
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</table>

Cross-checking on information (Note that this behaviour changes over time)

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<thead>
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<th>Page</th>
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4 errors

Information used:

- **MSV**
**RUNNING RECORD SHEET**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name: Max</th>
<th>Date: 5/22</th>
<th>Age: __ yrs __ mths</th>
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<tr>
<td>School: ACE</td>
<td>D. of B.: __________</td>
<td>Recorder: Cardella</td>
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</table>

**Text Titles**
- *Only portion of text*

**Errors**

<table>
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<th>Easy</th>
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<th>Hard</th>
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**Error Ratio**

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**Accuracy Rate**

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**Self-correction Ratio**

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<th>Hard</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>1:</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Directional Movement**

**Analysis of Errors and Self-corrections**
Information used or neglected [Meaning (M), Structure or Syntax (S), Visual (V)]

- Easy
- Instructional: Low confidence -- appeared often unsure of choices. Used visual cues with "appears"
- Hard

**Cross-checking on information (Note that this behaviour changes over time)**

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**Information used**

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Appendix O
Writing Samples from Games

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<th>Two-Way Sort</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>in it be i wo</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>hill well? Bill will fill</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name: Felicity</td>
<td>Two-Way Sort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
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<td>Name: Max</td>
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Piscataway, NJ: Heinemann. This page may be photocopied for single classroom use only.
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- From a
- Eat
- Snow
- Try
- Story
- Black
- Made
- From
- Red
- Blue
- Tornado
- Frog
- Home
- School
- Food
- Ten
- Morgan
- Bylan
- Happen
- Family
- Serene
- Nothing
- Picture
- Maggie
- Going
- Something
- Much
- In
- Chapter
- Books
- Everyone
- Probably
- Amphibian
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Appendix P
General Writing Samples

Name: [Student's Name]

High in the Sky
Write the contractions.

1. We've met them before.
   We have

2. They've come by plane.
   They have

3. He'll visit his friend.
   He will

4. She'll come home soon.
   She will

5. I've seen a jet.
   I have

6. We'll take a trip.
   We will

Skill: Contraction will, have

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Name: Max

Venn Diagram

Then & now

- They had fewer and fewer teachers.
- They had an area of recess.
- They didn't have buses.
- They go from 1st to 5th grade.

Now: We've got more rooms & more teachers. We've got a word wall, and they don't have a word wall.
Singular/Plural Nouns

Many nouns, or naming words, add -s to show more than one.

Read the sets of sentences. Draw a line under the sentence that has a naming word that names more than one.

1. Jan has her mittens. Jan has her mitten.
2. She will run up a hill. She will run up hills.
4. The dogs can jump. The dog can jump.

Look at each picture. Read each word. Write the plural naming word that matches the picture.

5. cat
6. sock

Scholastic Success With Grammar • Grade 1
Singular/Plural Nouns

Many nouns, or naming words, add -s to show more than one.

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1. Jan has her mittens.
   Jan has her mitten.

2. She will run up a hill.
   She will run up hills.

3. Jan runs with her dogs.
   Jan runs with her dog.

4. The dogs can jump.
   The dog can jump.

Look at each picture. Read each word. Write the plural naming word that matches the picture.

5. Cat
   Cats

6. Sock
   Socks
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Look at each picture. Read each word. Write the plural naming word that matches the picture.

5. cat  cats

6. sock  socks
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5. cat
   cat

6. sock
   sock
Singular/Plural Nouns

Many nouns, or naming words, add -s to show more than one.

Read each sentence. Draw a line under each naming word that means more than one.

1. I see hats and a cap.
2. It sits on eggs.
3. The girls swim.
4. Pam can pet cats.

Read each sentence. Write the naming word that means more than one.

5. The mugs are hot.
   
6. Mud is on my hands.
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5. The mugs are hot. mug
6. Mud is on my hands. hand
Name: Felicity

Picture Perfect

Underline each noun. Write.

1. The waves are very big. Waves
2. The birds are flying. Birds
3. The lifeguards are not here. Lifeguards
4. Are the clouds puffy and big? Clouds
5. Many crabs are digging. Crabs
6. Seashells look pretty. Seashells
7. Please pack some extra brushes. Brushes
8. Two white towels fell down. Towels
9. Three paintings are finished. Paintings
10. The cars are sandy. Cars

Bonus: Circle each word that names more than one person, place, or thing. Use each word in a sentence.

- crayons
- paper
- chairs
- dolphins
- gas
Underline each noun. Write.

1. The waves are very big. Waves
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Crayons  paper  chairs  dolphins  gas  Dolphins are swimming.
Name _______  Luke

Underline each noun. Write.

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Bonus: Circle each word that names more than one person, place, or thing. Use each word in a sentence.

(Example: Crayons - The artist used many crayons to make the painting.)
The hit here is about
Do the canine hit me
of me suffer ward
Zeke
Zeke will use strok
ware away Zeke does
He will austom the
fake and mars and venis
and thea free amunt
He will austom anyth
Penny

Because he has never walked a dog. And he has a cat. And he has a gentle cat. And the dog is hard on him. And maybe it is a
Max = The Night
He's gone
He's not.
He's his dog.
And before.
Because he walked a cat.
Seed Name: Cupcake seed

How to plant: You will need sprinkles, frosting, and push the cupcake seeds into the sprinkles. Put frosting over the sprinkles.

When to plant: Any time of the year.
Seed Name: Candy Corn

How to plant: You will need Candy Corn. Push the candy corn into the ground and water it for 3 hours non-stop.

When to plant: When winter is over, you have to plant it is in the
Seed Name: Candy Seeds

How to plant: You put the seed in sugar and put it in sugar and you wait for candy.

When to plant: At the end of winter.
Seed Name: Game Seeds

How to plant: Put the Magic seed disc into the ground and water the Magic seed disc until the Magic seed disc grows. Plant the Magic seed disc on June 1 while it is over.