Students with Disabilities in Self-Contained Classrooms: Strategies Improving Phonics in Reading

Elizabeth A. Armes
St. John Fisher College, eaa00170@students.sjfc.edu

How has open access to Fisher Digital Publications benefited you?

Follow this and additional works at: http://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/education_ETD_masters

Recommended Citation

Please note that the Recommended Citation provides general citation information and may not be appropriate for your discipline. To receive help in creating a citation based on your discipline, please visit http://libguides.sjfc.edu/citations.
Abstract
The current action research paper asked the question, “How do students with disabilities in a self-contained classroom use different phonics strategies to find success in their reading?” Phonics strategies aim to help students with disabilities increase their phonics skills. The research was conducted among five students in a self-contained classroom with multiple disabilities. The data was collected by interviewing teachers and students, delivering three phonics strategies, recorded observations, and field notes. The research study met each student at their individual level and sought to meet their individual needs. Overall these phonics strategies, can be beneficial to students with disabilities. Phonics is a foundation to learning to read. It is important that students build a strong foundation to become successful readers.

Document Type
Thesis

Degree Name
MS in Literacy Education

Department
Education

First Supervisor
Joellen Maples

Subject Categories
Education

This thesis is available at Fisher Digital Publications: http://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/education_ETD_masters/340
Students with Disabilities in Self-Contained Classrooms:
Strategies Improving Phonics in Reading

By

Elizabeth A Armes

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
M.S. Literacy Education

Supervised by

Dr. Joellen Maples

School of Arts and Sciences
St. John Fisher College

August 2015
The current action research paper asked the question, “How do students with disabilities in a self-contained classroom use different phonics strategies to find success in their reading?” Phonics strategies aim to help students with disabilities increase their phonics skills. The research was conducted among five students in a self-contained classroom with multiple disabilities. The data was collected by interviewing teachers and students, delivering three phonics strategies, recorded observations, and field notes. The research study met each student at their individual level and sought to meet their individual needs. Overall these phonics strategies, can be beneficial to students with disabilities. Phonics is a foundation to learning to read. It is important that students build a strong foundation to become successful readers.
Phonics Strategies for Students with Disabilities

The Common Core is placing more rigorous demands on students. When it comes to reading, students are expected to know more coming into Kindergarten than they were expected to know previously. In addition, students need to know many phonics skills to begin reading. These demands have made it challenging for students with disabilities to succeed at reading.

CKLA is a phonics-based program that is used by teachers around the country. CKLA stands for Core Knowledge Language Arts and is targeted at elementary students grades pre-k to twelfth grade. Common Core Standards are built into the CKLA program and this curriculum is based on the Common Core. It incorporates a listening and learning strand as well as a skills strand. The listening and learning strand is mainly whole group instruction. It is designed to build background knowledge and vocabulary for students. However, there are gaps in this curriculum. The listening and learning strand does not provide differentiation for students. In addition, the skills strand does not allow teachers to meet students at their instructional level. Students need to know the “code” before graduating Kindergarten. Students who do not have strong phonemic awareness and phonics skills will not be ready to use this curriculum in Kindergarten. Research has proven that phonics should be taught early on for students. Phonics instruction is a key component of literacy instruction and students rely on phonics for decoding. (McLemore and Wood, 2001).

CKLA and Common Core is new to districts and to many teachers around the country. However, we do not know when the curriculum is going to change or if it will ever change. Since, our curriculum is becoming more rigorous, students are expected to know more coming into Kindergarten. Students who are not able to keep up with the curriculum before coming to school need to build on phonemic awareness and their phonics skills before jumping into a
program. There is a relationship between phonemic awareness and reading achievement (Snider, 2001). Meaning, if students are able to get phonics instruction early on they will most likely become successful readers. Some students are going to progress differently than others. This is why we need to assess, differentiate, and monitor instruction for students. Snider confirms “value of phonemic awareness to later reading achievement” (p. 206). Setting up a foundation will create success for students later.

CKLA and Common Core are not supporting students with disabilities. Students who come into Kindergarten needing Special Education services; are not achieving at the level of their peers. More importantly, teachers should focus on each student’s individual skills to allow the achievement gap to close. If a student is not to the point of having pre-readiness skills in reading, when being instructed with the CKLA, they are only going to fall farther behind. When teachers work with students and give them time to respond they will see results. Successful teachers observe student achievement by those who outperform their peers and provide explicit instruction to struggling learners who need the additional modeling and support (Blair, Nichols, and Rupley, 2009). Student phonemic awareness and phonics skills should be built up before, introducing a rigorous program. Students who have a strong foundation will thrive in a rigorous program when it comes to being successful with reading.

Furthermore, when researching more about this topic, research showed different interventions and diagnostic tools to use for phonics instruction with struggling readers (Feagans-Vernon, 2010). Phonemic awareness is the ability to think about, notice, and work with individual sounds in words called phonemes (Chaban, 2010). A student with strong phonological awareness is able to blend and segment words, use onset and rime, rhyme and identify syllables. A student is then able to connect sounds to printed letters called phonics.
Phonetically capable students can alphabet match, decode, and identify sounds and letters. You can have phonological awareness without phonics but you cannot have phonics without phonological awareness. Phonological awareness skills are prerequisite skills for phonics. Though CKLA may have gaps within the program, phonics is the foundation to reading and therefore, struggling readers in a self-contained classroom need different phonics strategies to find success in their reading. By providing phonics strategies early on and more intensive instruction to students, they will become better readers later on.

 Phonics is the foundation to learning to read. Students with disabilities need different strategies to find success with their skills. Children come to school with a variety of literacy experiences. As students begin to socialize and participate within their surroundings, they also begin to learn the language. It is important for students to take action and become involved in their learning and this learning is most successful when there is modeling by the teacher. Students with disabilities are not going to learn the same way, however teachers should be differentiating instruction and providing phonics strategies to increase their readiness to read. When setting up a strong foundation for students early on, students will find more success in their reading later on. Different types of strategies are being used to help students with disabilities. There are many types of interventions that can be used for students with disabilities when teaching phonics skills. However, the most important part of the instruction, is the way the instruction is being delivered to the students. One to one and small group instruction is the best way to help students with disabilities and increasing their phonics skills. Instruction should also be intensive and explicit for students with disabilities who are struggling with phonics. This research study had support of teacher aides, interactive instruction, and implementation of the phonics strategies. The students throughout the study were able to make progress with their
phonics skills in at least one skill area. Some students still need more intense instruction to make further gains, however with the environment and instruction they are receiving in time they will begin to see growth in their skills. Not all students learn at the same pace. Students need time to master one skill before moving onto other skills. This research study met each student at their individual level and sought to meet their individual needs. Overall phonics strategies, can be beneficial to students with disabilities. By building a strong phonics foundation, teachers are aware of their students’ needs. Teachers are becoming aware of their students early on and giving them the intense instruction they need to become successful readers.

The research paper asked the question, “How do students with disabilities in a self-contained classroom use different phonics strategies to find success in their reading?” The research was conducted among five students in a self-contained classroom with multiple disabilities. The data was collected by interviewing teachers and students, delivering three phonics strategies, recorded observations, and field notes. The three phonics strategies conducted were Alphabet Action, Blending Match, and Syllable Match. The research study met each student at their individual level and sought to meet their individual needs. Overall these phonics strategies, can be beneficial to students with disabilities. Each student was able to improve in one skill area whether it was letter and sounds, identifying syllables, or blending. Phonics is a foundation to learning to read. It is important that students build a strong foundation to become successful readers. Teachers need to meet students at their instructional level to help to improve their skills.
Theoretical Framework

Phonics and phonemic awareness is a foundation to learning to read. It is important that students build a strong foundation to become successful readers. Literacy can be defined as “entailing code breaking, participation in knowledge of text, social uses of text, and analysis of the text” (Freebody and Luke, 1990, p. 15). “Code breakers” are people who engage in the relationship of the written symbols and spoken sounds of a language (alphabetic awareness) to become successful readers. Students who understand the “code” will have more success with reading. As people begin to socialize and participate within their surroundings, they also begin to learn the language. It is important for students to take action and become involved in their learning and this learning is most successful when there is modeling by the teacher.

Furthermore, before children even enter school they learn to acquire language through the environment and their experiences (Goodman, 1984). Children do not learn independently, but rather with the help of an adult (demonstrator or mediator). Children develop their language through observations and demonstrations. In addition, the way children are brought up and raised may have an influence on their language development. Some parents may read to the children frequently, while others may not. When students come to school they will already have a variety of experiences and exposure to language. Students who have not been enriched in literacy experiences prior to school, may find difficulties with reading. More importantly, phonemic awareness; recognizing sounds, letters, blending, segmenting, and etc. However, the teacher needs to differentiate for students and find strategies to help struggling readers.

In addition, upon entering school, children will have a variety of experiences with literacy. Children who are involved in play before school will demonstrate the functional principles (Goodman, 1984). Students will be more enriched in literacy experiences, if they are
involved in social experiences before school. On the other hand, Kucer (2009) explains predictable books help children to recognize patterns and give children a focus. These books are just one example teachers or parents can use with their children to help them to begin the reading process. Children who are brought up in homes where parents are college students or authors will experience functional principles differently than children whose parents only read the daily news, fill out forms, or write shopping list. This is not the fault of the students. Students will come to school having a variety of different experiences. It is the teacher’s job to help the students grow as readers and to encourage the parents to be active in their child’s education.

Therefore, it is critical to get to know the student’s abilities when coming to school and encourage growth in their skills and reading. An important aspect of literacy development is the relational principle (Goodman, 1984; Kucer, 2009). When talking about the relational principle, children relate letters to meaning. The relational principle is talking about signs, labels, and so on (Goodman). For example, a child may relate the letter “M” to the “M” in McDonalds. The child is connecting the letter “m” to food rather than to the specific place. According to Goodman, “written language represents meaning” and children are usually aware of this before entering school (p. 320). Children begin to realize the relationships between reading and writing, oral language, and orthography within their environment (Goodman). In addition, Kucer discusses or relates to the relational principle, but uses different terminology to explain his thinking. He notes that children generate and use many cues from meaning and through language, which he calls negotiating meaning and sign systems (Kucer). At a young age, children are very much involved in their environment. According to Kucer, being involved in your environment is a benefit to their literacy development. The print on grocery products allows students to build their print recognition, furthering their reading and written language.
Therefore, children begin to increase their oral language by acquiring new experiences and by being involved with print around them.

Lastly, children with multiple disabilities and struggling readers can often be labelled by their culture as disabled. According to McDermott and Varenne (1995) “Culture is an organization of hopes and dreams about how the world should be” (p. 337), meaning children with a disability are often not seen as part of the norm; therefore, they do not receive the services they should. This issue is in every society, with children being “left out” for not being within the “norm.” McDermott and Varenne continue “A disability may be a better display for the weaknesses of a cultural system than it is an account of real persons” (p. 327). However, we know that children with any disability deserve the same attention as any other child. In every culture, people strive for, and mark those who are to be marginalized and it is important to understand how they are put into these positions (McDermott and Varenne). Most importantly, it is important to understand how children with disabilities learn the language of their culture and what can be done to increase their language skills. Therefore, differentiating instruction and providing phonics strategies to increase their readiness to read.

**Research Question**

Phonics and phonemic awareness is a foundation to learning to read. It is important that students build a strong foundation to become successful readers. Given that phonics is the foundation to reading, this action research project asks, how do students with disabilities in a self-contained classroom use different phonics strategies to find success in their reading?

**Literature Review**

The literature review synthesizes current research on how phonics strategies improve reading skills for struggling readers with disabilities. More importantly, there are ways to help
students with disabilities that have difficulty with phonics skills by meeting their individual needs. The current research looks at early intervention strategies, instructional strategies, and intensive programs for students with disabilities who struggle with phonics. Theme one is struggling readers need to be identified early. The first section will discuss the importance of getting to know struggling readers early and will synthesize ways to assess students. More specifically identifying students with disabilities early on. In addition, the importance of phonics instruction is the way phonics skills leads to success in reading. When setting up a strong foundation for students early on, students will find more success in their reading later on. Students have many experiences prior to learning to read. By providing students with a strong phonics foundations, they will be more successful in decoding words later on. Theme two is strategies should be delivered in multiple ways to students with disabilities. The second section will discuss how different types of strategies are being used to help students with disabilities, and how these interventions should be delivered. There are many types of interventions that can be used for students with disabilities when teaching on phonics skills. However, the most important part of the instruction, is the way the instruction is being delivered to the students. The third theme is phonics instruction needs to be intensive. In the third section, it will discuss how instruction should continue to be intensive for struggling readers with disabilities to continue to close the achievement gap. In addition, this literature review will discuss different types of programs that are intensive and explicit for students with disabilities who are struggling with phonics. Although there have been many studies, and research gains, on struggling readers, more specifically students with disabilities, there continues to be research on struggling readers with disabilities and ways to help them be successful in reading.

**Struggling Readers Need to Be Identified Early**
Many students struggle with their reading skills daily, and even more so, students with disabilities. For students to be successful in their early school years, they must focus on alphabet letters and phonics instruction (McLemore and Wood, 2001). It is important to know students’ abilities and to assess their skills early on. Ahlgrim-Delzell, Baker, Browder, Flowers and Spooner (2010) state,

One of the challenges in assessing the reading ability of students with severe developmental disabilities is the lack of adequate measures of literacy for this student population. Many students have difficulty taking standardized assessments due to the lack of test-taking skills and the need for augmentative communication systems. (p. 501)

Many students with disabilities may have barriers that may not allow them to perform well on an assessment, when in fact they do know the material being presented to them. Students may not have verbal skills or the expressive skills to demonstrate their cognitive abilities. However, these students may be able to explain their knowledge and skills in other ways. This does not mean they are going to fall farther behind. The students who struggle to express themselves on a standard assessment, but do really know the material should be allowed to use other ways to demonstrate their skills. They should not be pushed along and misinterpreted for not knowing the material. It stresses the importance for testing students early and getting to know each and every student on an individual level. Lane and Oslick (2014) explain reading assessments in the classroom can help with identifying students early on and especially students who are struggling so teachers can provide different and effective ways to modify instruction. If teachers are able to identify students early who are struggling and have a true learning disability, teachers will be able to get those students the additional help they need.
Likewise, students with disabilities should be able to receive the additional help they need to close the achievement gap. By closing the achievement gap, students with disabilities and typical developing students can learn on similar levels. Snider (2001) states, “Educators should not infer that children who perform poorly on phonemic awareness tasks in Kindergarten are developmentally delayed or have a language disorder” (p. 209). However, those are the students that should be monitored and given additional help to see if they increase their skills. Students who are achieving low when entering Kindergarten should be monitored, however they should be given a chance to demonstrate the skills they have. It may take some students longer to show their abilities than others. However, if they do not, then teachers should look into other interventions to help the students. Lane and Oslick (2014) state, progress monitoring is a key tool to be using with students to collect data information. Progress monitoring will provide the evidence to see if students are truly responding to interventions. Teachers are not going to know if instruction is working unless they assess the progress along the way. Teachers can alter instruction as they go and be more effective if they are consistently assessing.

Furthermore, in a recent study about phonics-based interventions for students that are hearing impaired the research discussed how it took a student longer to respond to intervention. But after being consistent with the interventions and starting them early, when she reached elementary school she was demonstrating age appropriate reading (Oetting, Harris, Spychala, and Wang, 2013). The student demonstrated she was able to start intervention early and find success in her reading, even though she was facing barriers. When given extra help, students can overcome struggles in phonics skills and in reading when given time and the appropriate interventions. Ahlgrim-Delzell, Baker, Browder, Flowers and Spooner (2010) state, “meta-analysis suggest that phonics should be taught early. Teaching phonics at an early age can be
beneficial to other reading skills such as vocabulary and text comprehension” (p. 509). Research has proven that phonics should be taught early on for students. McLemore and Wood (2001) explain phonics instruction is very important to literacy instruction. Students should depend on phonics when trying to decode words they do not know. Phonics instruction sets the stage for reading skills. Therefore to help students who are demonstrating difficulty to read, teachers should take a step back and look at phonics interventions. This will build students’ skills to become ready to be a reader. Ahlgrim-Delzell, Baker, Browder, Flowers and Spooner (2010) state, “students with disabilities should be given opportunities to increase access to literature and increase independence as readers” (p. 510). All students have a right to become readers, and teachers can help students by building their phonics skills early.

Therefore, in a study about hearing loss, students were able to sustain phonemic awareness and phonics skills, and continued to improve their early reading skills. The students were introduced to a reading tool called visual phonics, a phonics-based program used to increase reading performance (Oetting, Harris, Spychala, and Wang, 2013). Even at a young age these students were able to face the challenge of hearing loss and sustain phonemic awareness to become successful readers. Similarly, Snider (2001) explains, “There is a cause-effect relationship between phonemic awareness and reading achievement” (p. 203). Thus meaning, if students are able to get phonics instruction early on they will most likely become successful readers. Some students are going to progress differently than others. This is why we need to assess, differentiate, and monitor instruction for students. Snider confirms phonemic awareness is very important to a student’s reading achievement later on. Phonemic awareness sets the foundation for reading for a student. Setting up a foundation will create success for students later.
Furthermore, students continue success in reading when they have benefitted from strong literacy instruction. Morris, Romski, Sevcik and Wise (2010) state, “phonological awareness is related to reading performance and individuals can benefit from phonemic literacy instruction” (p. 1170). Students should have phonics instruction before beginning to read. Students who are struggling with reading should spend more time on phonics skills. Students with disabilities who may be falling behind, should be given time to begin reading when they are ready. According to Morris, Romski, Sevcik and Wise, children with mild intellectual disabilities may be able to learn to read in a way that is similar to typically developing children. Students with disabilities may be able to learn similarly to typically developing students; however, there has to be differentiation for students to meet individual needs. Typical students or not, students do not learn the same way. Students need different ways of learning the same concept. However, if teachers can help students earlier rather than later, students will achieve reading that much quicker. Coyne and McAlenney (2015) state there are many schools that struggle to provide early intervention services due to financial limitations and staffing shortages. The school struggles to provide early intervention services due to these limitations and then the students are not able to receive service early on. The students are then affected due to the school is not offering these services and the students are ultimately the ones that are going to suffer. However, Coyne and McAlenney explain “some students with strong initial response to the intervention curriculum may be successfully exited from intervention” (p. 63). In those schools who are offering interventions to students, this may occur. In schools who feel the need, students will quickly exit interventions or may not offer it for this reason. Although, there may be one or two students who truly need interventions to succeed. Even though students may be returning to general education at the end of school year, interventions should be offered on a
needed basis for all students. Abbott, Greenwood, Kamps, Kaufman, Veerkamp and Willis (2008) state, “schools were able to manage the intervention for students in early grades before the learning problems became severe and students fell too far behind in reading to ever catch up to typically developing peers” (p. 109). By helping students with their reading and phonemic awareness early on, they were able to close the gap and allow students success in their reading. By identifying the problems early, it paid off in the end. In addition, Meisels and Xue (2004) explain “higher levels of integrated language arts and phonics instruction are associated with greater gains” (p. 218). Phonics instruction can stand alone without being combined with other curriculum. When discussing students with disabilities, this may be more appropriate for them. They need one thing to focus on rather than multiple things at one time. This approach could not work for all students. What is important according to Abbott, Greenwood, Kamps, Kaufman, Veerkamp and Willis (2008) is schools need and should be implementing interventions for all students at risk for reading problems. Students who are sending red flags to teachers should be monitored immediately and get help right away. On the other hand, if teachers are progress monitoring their students constantly, there should be no room for error or students slipping through the cracks. It may take students more interventions and strategies than others; however teachers should never give up on a student. Abbott, Greenwood, Kamps, Kaufman, Veerkamp and Willis state, “determining for whom, when, and what intervention is appropriate and monitoring progress through systematic data collection” (p. 112). Teachers who are accomplishing this for their students are doing a serve to themselves and their students. Students are going to get the on-going help they need. Moreover, Meisels and Xue (2004) state, Instruction is effective when it provides children with systematic activities in phonics that help them to acquire better alphabetic reading skills. Phonics instruction is clearly
important in learning to read, because a major task facing beginning readers is to “crack
the code” or figure out how the alphabetic system of the English language works. (p. 219)
Students cannot be expected to jump right into reading. Students have to learn phonics
skills before reading. Students who are struggling with phonics skills, should spend more time
strengthening their skills before learning to read. When students build strong phonemic
awareness and phonics skills, it is setting them up for success in reading. Students with
disabilities should begin interventions for phonics early to give them time to build their skills.

Therefore, when students enter school, teachers are not going to know the abilities of
their students. They quickly learn the abilities of their students through assessment and progress
monitoring. It is critical to getting to know students early on to know where students’ skills are
and where to begin instructing them. When teachers have a starting point for instruction with
students, it is easier to get students the help they need along the way. In addition, if the students’
skills regress or progress over the year, the teacher is tracking the data as the year goes on.
Meisels and Xue (2004) state phonics instruction is effective for all students no matter what their
ability level may be. It has proven to be effective for all students at all different levels.
Regardless if students have disabilities or not, it is important to take time to get to know all
students and their abilities. Students are going to learn at different levels and paces. It is not fair
to a student for a teacher to jump into curriculum without getting to know her students first and
placing them in the correct groups. Students with disabilities are going to need more support and
interventions put in place early on. Meisels and Xue explain, when children begin to learn to
read they need to know the letters of the alphabet and they need to understand letter-sound
relationships among letters. Without knowing if students have these skills, teachers are not
going to be able to effectively teach his or her students reading. Once students have mastered
these skills, they will be able to begin decoding and learning to read. In addition, Campbell (2015) states, “focus on explicit instruction of phoneme manipulation could disadvantage children who have not grasped the phonological insights that spoken language can be broken up to syllable units” (p. 19). For students who have speech impairments or difficulty identifying sounds within a word, identifying phonemes and syllables can be difficult for students, especially students with disabilities; even more so preschool students who are not developmentally ready.

It is important to make sure students who struggle with these skills, to master them first before moving onto new skills. In addition, working closely with the Speech Pathologist to provide more intense instruction when they are providing services as well. Campbell (2015) explains, when teachers and educators look at phonics learning as child-centered and play-based rather than just for reading, students have the opportunity to have more rich experiences of written and visual texts, rather than just looking at reading as decoding words. Teachers have to reach students at their level and teach students to their appropriate level. A phonics strategy for a first grader is going to look a lot different for a preschooler. Introducing phonics to children when they are young will only benefit them in the long run. Furthermore, McIntyre, Petrosko and Rightmeyer, (2006) state, “thus we are not recommending any particular program for whole classes or schools. Instead, we recommend much attention be given to individual assessment of children’s reading skills and concepts and consideration of the instruction that matches those needs” (p. 228). By meeting the needs of the individual student, it is differentiating for all students, instead of following a specific curriculum that may not meet the needs of students with disabilities. In addition, the curriculum could have holes and be missing important parts to phonics instruction. The curriculum could also be lacking ways to make the learning more interesting and motivating to the students. Ultimately it is up to the teacher to reach all of the
students’ needs in the classroom in a variety of ways. Teachers have to make sure the students in the classroom are making gains and achieving their goals. This is a difficult task for teachers today in education. Teachers have to make sure data collection is current and they are consistently assessing their students. McIntyre, Petrosko and Rightmeyer say struggling readers struggle because the model does not reach their individual literacy level. When students’ needs are not being met, teachers have to think outside the box to how can they reach them. Teachers will need to look to addition resources to help students become successful with their phonological skills.

Moreover, when determining if students need help early on with phonics, it is not as easy as sitting down with a student and figuring them out in one sitting. The student may need to be monitored over time or assessed with tools. There are tools to help teachers assess students with disabilities who are struggling with phonics. Benedict, Brownwell and Yujeong (2014) explain

The use of CORE Phonics Survey as a diagnostic assessment is to be used in combination with progress monitoring tests such as DIBELS or other curriculum-based measurements tests for teachers identifying students’ needs and providing intensive instruction to students with disabilities. (p. 47).

By using this tool teachers can find out where students need help with phonics. Teachers will have another way to guide their instruction and what the student should be focusing on. CORE Phonics Survey makes it efficient, so teachers are not guessing on what to assess the students on. Benedict, Brownwell and Yujeong explain, the implementation and interpretation of this tool can allow teachers to provide phonics instruction aligned to their students’ instructional needs. This tool will help teachers be more effective in phonics instruction and ready to instruct students with disabilities. The Barton Tool #7 and Criterion Test of Basic Skills are two phonic
Barton Tool #7 assesses student’s ability to decode using phonics rules in isolation. The Criterion Test is on phonetic word attack skills, including letter recognition, letter sounding, blending and sequencing, phonics patterns, multisyllabic words, sight words, and letter writing (Lane and Oslick, 2014). All of these tests can be used to monitor and assess students abilities in phonics. In addition, Gischlar and Vesay (2014) explain, research proves that preschool years are crucial to the development of early literacy skills. Students should have some schooling before coming to kindergarten. It is important to introduce the pre-readiness skills to students early. In addition, students should be exposed to environmental prints and basic skills by their parents before coming to school as well. However, these skills are not always taught or exposed to children before coming to Kindergarten. Then if students are struggling and may have a disability, they have time to receive interventions to get caught back up to their peers. Gischlar and Vesay state, it is critical to monitor a child’s progress. Formal assessment provides information about the child’s development in foundational skills that helps the teacher to plan learning experiences for the child. Even at the preschool level, teachers should be monitoring students’ progress. The information can then be shared with their next placement on how their early school years went. Moreover, Lane and Oslick say, “It is important to monitor the progress of individual students so instruction can be modified as needed” (p. 544). By doing all this students will receive the best education and they will become successful in reading.

Many students with disabilities struggle with phonics and phonemic awareness. However, it is important to assess students’ abilities and get to know them before instructing them. By getting to know students earlier rather than later, teachers are doing a service for students with disabilities by getting them the interventions and putting strategies in place before
it is too late. Students need to be progress monitored and instruction should be differentiated to students’ individual needs. Teachers are setting students up for success and building a strong foundation for optimal reading for students.

**Strategies Should Be Delivered In Multiple Ways To Students With Disabilities**

Interventions and strategies are key to helping students with disabilities with phonics. How the intervention is delivered to the students is very important to make sure the students are going to show success. Amendum, Burchinal, Gallagher, Ginsberg, Kainz, Rose, and Vernon-Feagons (2010) stated, “there are three basic elements that are important, explicit instruction, early intervention, and small or one to one intensive instruction” (p. 184). When students with disabilities are struggling with phonics and they are not responding to the current teaching styles of the teacher or the current environment of the classroom; these students need more intense and explicit instruction to reach their needs. Students who do not receive instruction this way are not going to get their individual needs met and are going to fall farther behind. Teachers who are struggling to deliver instruction this way to students with disabilities who are struggling with phonemic awareness need to seek help from a reading specialist or literacy coach. In addition, teachers should utilize the extra staff in the room or other teacher aide’s in the building. Greaney, Ryder, and Tunmer W (2008) also state, “explicit, systematic instruction instruction in the code relating spelling to pronunciations is necessary for most children” (p. 350). Most would agree that any student who is struggling, needs more intense instruction to make his or her needs met. In addition, the type of instruction needs to be changed to meet the needs of the individual student. The way instruction is being delivered is not working and things need to be altered to be more successful for the student. Therefore, Greaney, Ryder and Tunmer state, “explicit instruction in phonemic awareness and alphabetic coding skills is likely to be critical” (p. 350).
Students with disabilities are not going to learn successfully these skills in a whole group setting. These students are going to need more intense instruction to remember the letter-sound correspondence and other phonemic awareness skills. In addition, it is difficult to keep the students attention in a whole group. When students are in a small group or have the one-to-one instruction they are more likely to pay attention and grasp the concepts quicker. Magnotta and Rose (2012) explain, it is important for students who are scoring lower on reading assessments, to increase the amount of time they spend on reading, particularly in the early reading years, to increase their chances of becoming good readers. The more time students spend early on, the greater the pay off will be later on in their schooling. However, sometimes students exhibit behaviors and lack of motivation for learning. When these types of situations happen this does not benefit and help improve the skills of the students. Students with disabilities are already facing many struggles and when it comes to school and learning, often it is a struggle for them. Behaviors can impede on students learning therefore, leaving the impression the student does not have the cognitive skills they truly have. According to Amendum, Burchinal, Gallagher, Ginsberg, Kainz, Rose and Vernon-Feagons (2010),

“Targeted Reading Intervention delivered by classroom teachers in one-to-one 15 minute sessions over the course of more than a semester, could benefit the word reading skills of kindergarten struggling readers. In addition there is evidence that kindergarten struggling readers were catching up to their non-struggling peers” (p. 190).

The Targeted Reading Intervention targets students and delivers intense instruction to students who are struggling. It was proven to be successful for Kindergarten students who were struggling. Kindergarten is an important year, many changes happen in this year with students both academically and socially. Teachers want to make sure students are off on the right foot
STRATEGIES IMPROVING PHONICS

and on the road to successful reading. By providing this type of instruction, it will allow students to build stronger foundations and catch up to their peers. Moreover, Magnotta and Rose (2012) explain, small group instruction is important to provide specific teaching, practice, and feedback opportunities to students. It allows teachers to give students the individual attention they need, responding to their needs and also allowing the students to build relationships with the teacher to be more willinging to respond to the teacher. In any program there should be differentiation for students. Thus meaning, students should be working in smaller groups to get their needs meet individually. If students are struggling more than others, they need to receive intense one-to-one instruction. Students with disabilities who struggle with phonemic awareness need to receive explicit, intense one-to-one instruction. The reason for providing the delivery of instruction this way, is to allow students’ needs to be met and to give those students the best education possible.

Furthermore, interventions can take on a negative view, when in fact they have a positive impact. Interventions are a positive way to get students intensive help and increase their skills. Ahn and Goodwin (2010) state, “morphological interventions show that morphological interventions are successful, with the level of success differing depending on the literacy outcome” (p. 203). Morphological interventions is one way instruction can be delivered to help students with disabilities who are struggling with phonics. In addition, Ahlgrim-Delzell, Baker, Browder and Flowers (2012) explain, “students with moderate intellectual disabilities could make gains in phonics through the use of Corrective Reading Program, which uses a direct instruction approach to decoding” (p. 238). However, morphological intervention is not focusing on the same skill as Corrective Reading Program, they both aim to increase phonics skills. In addition, they both are directed to help students with disabilities. Both of these interventions can
be delivered to help increase phonics skills in students. Morphological instruction supports literacy achievement for students who need additional support in learning to read and spell. The instruction suggests it should be taught across all grade levels, allowing students to embed skills rather than isolate skills (Ahn and Goodwin; 2010). When students have opportunities to learn skills across grade levels, it allows for repetition and so the skills can stick with the student. Students would benefit learning variety of different people, rather than one person as well. Moreover, Ahn and Goodwin state, “instruction in morphological relationships seems to improve phonological awareness, perhaps because with more difficult word pairs, it is difficult to separate these linguistic dimensions from one another, and therefore instruction in one is likely to improve the other” (p. 204). This type of intervention is important for student with disabilities to receive. The instruction is going to make students with disabilities more aware of the letter-sound relationships, especially a single phoneme in a word. The English language is complex and teachers have to make sure they are providing appropriate skills interventions at the appropriate time. On the other hand, Ahn and Goodwin state, read-alouds are proving to promote early reading skills for young students. Students use listening comprehension to build their early reading skills. Students may be listening for initial sounds, syllables in a word, blends, digraphs, and etc. These are all phonics skills needed to know prior to learning to read. If students are able to listen to, speak, and manipulate different parts of phonics skills, they are going to become successful readers. It is essential to that interventions are being put in place for students and more importantly, how they are being delivered to the students.

Consequently, instruction delivered to students with disabilities is key when struggling with phonics skills. Camahalan and Wyraz (2015) say small group instruction does not allow for students to sit back and listen. It lends for students to be active participants and forces the
students to be engaged in their learning. When working together with a smaller group of students, the teacher has time to grab their attention. Camahalan and Wyraz explain, students showed eagerness and willingness to learn from the teacher. The students were excited and motivated about the lessons. The reasons they students were excited and motivated were due to the lessons being differentiated and tailored to their needs. In addition, the lessons did not follow the same format every time. The lessons had variety and sparked the students’ interests. Instead of doing worksheets, the teachers created hands-on fun activities for the students to learn. At the beginning the students worked on letter sounds and the beginning of the blending of words. The students had fun tossing around bean bags and being able to work in groups with one another.

When working with fewer students, it is easier to appeal to their interests, making the lessons and activities more engaging to them. In addition, with fewer students, teachers can keep the students attention for longer periods of time. Then the teacher is able to get in more instructional time with the students who are struggling. On the other hand, Dreyer, Ehri, Flugman, and Gross, (2007) state, “tutoring was more effective than small-group instruction for teaching reading to struggling readers, despite the fact that the skills taught were similar in the two programs” (p. 443). Delivering instruction with the individual, the teacher was able to meet the needs of the individual and not have to worry about any other students. According to Dreyer, Ehri, Flugman, and Gross, tutoring proved to be more successful to individuals than other ways of instruction. Working one on one with the student allowed the teacher to grasp the attention of the student. The student had more reading time and received greater amount of feedback on their reading with a tutor. Students’ needs were being met and proved to be engaged with their tutor.

Sometimes small group instruction does not work for students. Schools are finding that tutors make it possible for reading instruction to a lot of struggling readers. It has shown that tutoring
has been a good thing for these students (Peyton, Jenkins, Vadasy and Sanders, 2002).

Depending on the severity of students’ needs, it is going to be up to the teacher to decide what type of instruction students are going to receive. Dreyer, Ehri, Flugman and Gross (2007) state, “Paraprofessionals delivered RES tutoring as effectively as reading specialists and credentialed teachers” (p. 442). These teachers were effective in the delivery of their instruction even though they were not as qualified and knowledgeable as teachers. It shows when teachers take time to work with students on skills, students can make growth, especially when the students are motivated and willing to learn. Similarly, Camahalan and Wyraz explain, using lessons that are interactive and hands on, students become more engaged in the lesson and are more willing to listen to the teacher. Students do not enjoy listening to their teacher preaching at them all day long. Students would rather be engaged in learning and making what they are learning memorable for them. If students are engaged in their learning, making it memorable, they are most likely going to remember it. The skills they are learning have to have meaning for them in order for it to stick in their brains. Especially for students with disabilities, they need multiple ways to learn one concept. By making lessons more hands-on and interactive, the students are more prone to remember those skills.

Interventions and strategies are key to helping students with disabilities with phonics. The way teachers choose to deliver interventions to students is very important to make sure the students are going to show success. Not all students are going to respond well to working in a small group. They may be distracted by their peers and need more individualized instruction. Students may need one-to-one instruction or tutoring to meet their individual needs. However, no matter the delivery of instruction, teachers should be differentiating instruction for students. This will allow for students to have instructional needs met and for students to get the most help
in their reading. Students may respond to one type of instruction for a while and then need to alter or change instruction again based on their needs at that time. Students learning and needs are always changing and so is education. When students are more motivated and willing to learn, teachers are going to see the greatest success and growth in their skills. No matter what, students’ needs need to be met and instruction needs to be a certain way for that to happen.

**Phonics Instruction Needs to Be Intensive**

Students with disabilities will learn phonics skills successfully when given more intense and explicit instruction. When instruction is delivered intensely students are more successful in obtaining information and remembering the skills later on. McLemore and Wood explain (2001) explain, “Research evidence over the past 70 years indicates overwhelmingly that direct, explicit instruction in phonics is needed and contributes to better development of decoding, word recognition, and comprehension” (p.3). Students who receive instruction this way are going to become successful readers, especially students with disabilities. When instruction is direct and explicit there is no room for error and the students have clear expectations of what they need to know and learn. The students are able to understand the concepts of what they are learning and grasp onto the skills more quickly and retain the information being taught to them. Blair, Nichols and Rupley (2009) explain,

Struggling readers are more likely to learn essential reading skills and strategies if the direct or explicit model of instruction is part of the teacher’s repertoire of teaching methods. Directly / explicitly teaching reading means imparting new information to students through meaningful teacher-student interactions and teacher guidance of student learning. In this approach, the teacher clearly leads the teacher-learning process. At the heart of the direct instruction method are explicit explanations, modeling or
demonstrating, and guided practice. Direct / explicit instruction needs to be an integral part of learning the major content strands of the reading process, phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. (p. 125)

Students with disabilities need this type of instruction in order to increase their skill sets. Some students need it to be more intense than others. Students will learn skills more successfully through direct and explicit instruction because they will be able to retain the information through the guided and modeling with the teacher. McLemore and Wood explain, learning phonics is closely related to a child’s previous experiences. Previous experiences can be both written and oral language. When children learn the alphabet, they learn to connect the letters to sounds they hear and then they can blend those sounds together to form words. However, to close the gap, they need the instruction to meet their needs and need explicit explanations, modeling, and guided practice. Students rely on teachers to guide them in their instruction. In contrast this is not the case for all students with disabilities. According to Braun, Fuchs, Fuchs, Otaiba, Thompson, Yang, et.al (2002) “teachers do not know how to make mainstream instruction sufficiently clear, compelling, differentiated, iterative, data-driven, and supportive so that all children will learn” (p. 309). Not all students will be in a self-contained classroom. Students with disabilities may be in many different types of placements. However, this does not mean that teachers cannot meet their needs within the setting. Explicit instruction needs to be setup or teachers need to receive more professional development on how to meet those student’s needs. In addition, there may be a lack of resources in the classroom that special education services can access for the teacher. Braun, Fuchs, Fuchs, Otaiba, Thompson, Yang, et.al say,

If schools must rely on expert instruction outside the general classroom to effect successful outcomes for all students, then teachers and researchers must become
significantly more savvy at integrating what professionals do across different settings than they have been in the past. (p. 309)

When schools realize this is occurring within classrooms, it is better to receive assistance than ignore the problem. It would not benefit the students to carry out instruction, if the teachers are not being effective. Secondly, if teachers were not confident in the delivery and intensity of their instruction, not only would the teachers be failing, but the students’ needs would not be met either. Schools should take action and allow their teachers to seek professional development to strengthen their skills. When there are strong and knowledgeable teachers, there will be successful students. In contrast Allor, Champlin, Cheatham, Mathes, and Roberts (2010) explain, students with IQ’s in the mild and moderate range of ID can make significant progress across time and respond reading interventions. When teachers work with students and give them time to respond they will see results. Students with disabilities are going to need more time and direct instruction to respond to instruction. Their learning styles are different from those of typically developing students. Similarly Blair, Nichols and Rupley (2009) explain, “Successful teachers are teachers whose students consistently outperform their peers, rely on instructional flexibility so they can provide explicit instruction to struggling learners who need the additional modeling and support” (p. 126). It is not a competition between teachers; however it is putting students first. It is getting to know the students’ needs and addressing them appropriately. Teachers are making time for those who are struggling rather than ignoring the problem. Moreover, Allor, Champlin, Cheatham, Mathes and Roberts (2010) state, students with ID experience needs that are different from those of typical students with reading disabilities. The important difference was the amount of time required to achieve basic literacy skills. Students took three years of intensive academic instruction to catch back up to their typical peers. In the
first year of intervention, there was little to no progress for the students. It is important to get interventions going as soon as possible to give students with disabilities the maximum amount of time to catch up to their peers. On the contrary, Peyton, Jenkins, Vadasy and Sanders (2002) state, phonics based reading skills should be identified as soon as possible to identify reading problems. There is a value by supplementing phonics early on before students go into the first grade and start reading. Teachers should not be waiting until first grade to realize their students have a reading problem. This can be decreased by making sure students have intense phonics instruction and master these skills. On the other hand, students with disabilities are going to need more time than their other peers, and their instructional time is going to look differently as well. It is important teachers monitor and assess students to catch the ones who are struggling before there is too much of a gap. According to Blair, Nichols and Rupley (2009) state, when mastering the reading process there are five instructional tasks that are essential to reading. They are phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. In order to be a successful reader, phonics and phonemic awareness need to be mastered first. Since it takes students with disabilities more time to master these skills, they especially need interventions implemented early and direct instruction.

Lastly, intensive phonics instruction is not going to look the same for all students. Students with disabilities are going to need different approaches to instruction to be successful. Hudson, Konold, Lane and Pullen (2009) claim, “the importance of early intervention is quite clear. The notion that early, intensive reading instruction could alleviate early reading failures and narrow the achievement gap warrants further attention” (p. 278). Teacher need to pay attention to students’ awareness of phonics skills. These need to be mastered first. By building a strong foundation, it will allow students to become stronger readers. On the other hand,
Duchaine, McDaniel and Jolivette, (2010) explain, Corrective Reading as an explicit reading program providing explicit lessons, small groups, modeling, praise, feedback, and effective pacing. This program provides intensive instruction to students who have not yet mastered basic reading skills. This intervention is another example of intensive and direct instruction for students with disabilities to receive when struggling with phonics. Corrective Reading helped students make appropriate choices and get the help they needed in reading. In addition those students were willing to receive help. The results of the study expressed the needs of the teachers and students with emotional and behavioral needs to have effective programs to implement and to use with the students (Duchaine, McDaniel and Jolivette). When a program works for students and teachers, the school should continue to implement the program for the students. When new programs and curriculum are implemented year after year a couple things come into play. There is not enough time for the teachers to get to know the programs and the students do not have time to adjust to the new curriculum. Similarly, there was an intervention strategy designed called University of Florida Literacy Initiative (UFLI) that was created to provide individualized assistance to struggling beginning readers. The intervention proved to increase skills of struggling readers (Hudson, Konold, Lane and Pullen; 2009). Like Corrective Reading, this intervention was successful as well. Studies are proving that there are many interventions out there for students available for students with disabilities who are struggling with phonics. In addition, these interventions are stressing the importance of learning phonics first to find success in reading. Also, the interventions are intensive and explicit to meet the needs of individual students. Hudson, Konold, Lane and Pullen state,

For struggling readers, the acquisition of literacy skills requires extensive and thorough understanding of the alphabetic principle. In the UFLI tutoring model, this understanding
is developed through word work with manipulative letters and written word work during sentence writing. These instructional elements provide students with the practice they need to learn to decode words and to recognize high frequency words. (p. 292)

Hands-on and manipulatives help students with disabilities make meaning of the skill they are trying to learn. Corrective Reading and UFLI are very two different types of interventions for students with disabilities, however one may work better for one student over another. Interventions are strategies used with students who are struggling not just students with disabilities. However, students with disabilities learn more effectively with explicit instruction and in a small group or one-to-one setting when implementing these interventions.

These are not the only two interventions that are used with students with disabilities. In a recent study, two other interventions provided to students within the course of their school day were Phono-Graphix program and Read Naturally Program. The first program was offered to students for two fifty minute sessions. The next program was offered for one hour per day. Each program was offered for a total of eight weeks. Across sixteen weeks of interventions, there was significant improvement (Anthony, Denton, Fletcher and Francis; 2006). These interventions proved to be effected for students even in the short amount of time they were implemented to the students. On the other hand, in another study the effects of phonics instruction in small group were examined to see if Kindergartners could improve their word reading skills (Joseph, Kunesh and Noltemeyer, 2013). This intervention also helped students with phonics instruction. In addition, students were able to receive instruction in a small group where they could focus and get their needs met. According to Joseph, Kunesh and Noltemeyer, explicit instruction should begin in kindergarten when students first enter school. Teachers should not wait until they reach higher grade levels. Students who are struggling with basic reading skills, this is most important
that they receive direct and explicit instruction to increase their phonics skills. By providing Kindergarten students with this type of instruction, it decreases their risk of failing at reading later on. Teachers should be focusing on letter-sound correspondences with basic decodable words and consonant-vowel-consonant patterns. By teaching and modeling these skills over and over throughout the year, the students are going to grasp onto the meaning over time. However it is going to take students with disabilities time to learn these skills. Especially, if students are coming into the classroom at all different levels teachers need to be explicit in their teaching and students will eventually catch on and hold meaning to the instruction. Joseph, Kunesh and Noltemeyer state, by providing early and intensive literacy instruction to kindergartners at risk of reading failure greatly improves their reading achievement in the primary grades. Children who enter kindergarten with low literacy skills are especially in need of appropriate types and sufficient amounts of instruction.

Students with disabilities are going to need to receive that much more intervention as well. It is going to need to start early so they are not even farther behind. Some students with disabilities may be very capable in reading and not in math. Others may be capable in math and not reading. Students with disabilities tend to be behind their other peers though. It is important these students receive interventions and they are delivered and to the right degree for each student. Anthony, Denton, Fletcher and Francis (2006) state, “even students with persistent, severe reading difficulties can benefit from intensive reading intervention” (p. 464). This statement includes students with disabilities. Students should never give up hope, and they should keep on trying. When working hard at something, eventually they will see progress. Things are not easy for everyone in life, and some people have to work a little harder at it. Students with disabilities
face some barriers, and they are going to have to get help early on to get the most help they can to become successful readers. Moreover, Joseph, Kunesh and Noltemeyer explain,

Flashcard drill and practice method provides students with many opportunities to practice skills with corrective feedback so that rate at performing those skills increases. These methods have been used to teach struggling readers to read words rapidly and repeatedly until correct responses are produced effortlessly or with automaticity. (p. 122)

This is another intervention that can be used to help students with their phonics skills. This intervention could also be used with letter-sound correspondence. Students can practice these skills rather quickly and learn to produce sounds and letters effortlessly. This technique or style of strategy could be implemented with many different types of phonics skills. These are only a few interventions explained to help students who are struggling or students with disabilities. There are an endless amount of interventions that could be found to use with students on phonics. It is important to remember to assess and catch struggling readers early, begin to implement to correct type of instruction whether it be small group or one-to-one instruction, and make sure instruction is explicit and intensive.

In conclusion, research has proven there are phonics strategies to help improve reading skills for struggling readers with disabilities. More importantly, ways to help students with disabilities who have difficulty with phonics skills by meeting their individual needs. When staring to work with a student with a disability, it is important to assess and identify the need of the student first. Getting to know the students’ reading abilities will help the teacher to plan and implement the best possible lessons and activities. When instructing students with disabilities who are struggling with phonics, they should be placed in a small group or one-to-one instructional group to make sure their individual needs are met. Lastly, when implementing the
interventions to the students they need to be intensive and explicit. The teacher is teaching directly to the student and providing feedback. Direct teaching allows the student to gain more success towards their reading and intensive programs for students with disabilities who struggle with phonics. There have been many studies, and research gains, on struggling readers, more specifically students with disabilities, and there continues to be research on struggling readers with disabilities and ways to help them be successful in reading. Currently, the Common Core is being implemented. However, this does not allow for differentiation for all students. Students with disabilities struggle to keep up with the curriculum and to close the achievement gap. Teachers are consistently looking for other ways to meet students’ needs. Most importantly, there aren’t many ways teachers can help students with students improve their phonics strategies when the Common Core and the Core Knowledge Language Arts Curriculum does not allow for differentiation of instruction.

Method

Context

The research for this study took place at a rural district between Buffalo and Rochester New York. The population of the town where the research took place is 5,942 in 2012. The estimated household income in 2012 was $36,000 and the estimated values of houses was $66,000. The average age of people in the town in 2012 was 40. The school is an elementary school within the district and where the research took place is in a special education classroom.

Within the school district according to the New York State Report Card for 2013-2014, the total population for the school was 467 students. There were 230 males and 237 females within the school. The population is approximately 7% African American, 8% Hispanic, 1%
Asian, 75% White, and 8% Multiracial. Other populations in the school makeup 2% limited English proficient students, 12% students with disabilities, and 62% economically disadvantaged students. The New York State Report Card broke down students by grade as well, there were 77 students in prek, 115 students in kindergarten, 119 students in first grade, 128 students in second grade, 99 students in third grade, and 6 students who were considered ungraded. There were 41 educators who taught at this elementary school between 2013-2014.

Furthermore, the research was conducted in a 6:1:1 classroom within the elementary school. The classroom consisted of five students total in the classroom. Three of the students are boys and two of the students are girls. There are two classroom aides in the classroom and one classroom teacher. One of the classroom aides is a 1:1 for a students and the other classroom aide is for the whole classroom. The grade level in the classroom is kindergarten through second grade. The classroom consisted of students with multiple disabilities mainly with autism and intellectual disabilities. Lastly, related service providers pushed in and pulled out students from the classroom servicing students throughout their school day.

Participants

The participants in the study included five students from a special education classroom from the district explained above. In addition, the teacher aides from the classroom are also involved in the study as well. The group of students consisted of five students, three of them were boys and two of them were girls. The students ranged from the ages 5 to 8. In addition, they aged from the grade levels kindergarten to second grade. All of these students are receiving special education services and have IEP’s. The students come from low-income families and receive free lunches at the school. All of the students receive all of their instruction from the 6:1:1 classroom, except one student who receives his math instruction from a 15:1 classroom.
The teacher aides in the classroom are also involved in the research study. Both of the aides have been working for the district for approximately 20 years. They are very knowledgeable about their jobs and when it comes to working with students with disabilities.

Joe (pseudonym) is a white six year old boy. He is a first grader in the classroom. He has diagnosis of Speech Impairment. Joe is the only child who lives with his mother and father who had him when they were young, however Joe has much support from his grandparents. He has a loving and caring family who are willing to help in and out of the classroom. They want what is best for him. He has many family members who work in the district as well. Joe is a smart boy who goes to 15:1 for math. Joe is working on grade level in both reading and math. He is reading at a level E. Joe struggles with writing, as he does not yet have the proper fine motor skills and muscle strength to write. He is a leader in the classroom and sets examples for the other students. He likes to be a teacher helper. Joe has struggled to play socially with others, however this is becoming easier for him.

Sam (pseudonym) is a white six year old boy. He is a kindergartner in the classroom. Sam has a diagnosis of Other Health Impairment. Sam is the only child who lives with his mother, three aunts, grandmother, and grandfather. His grandmother has legal guardianship of him. Sam is a failure to thrive child who struggles with eating and drinking. Sam is small and weighs less for his age. Sam seeks attention from adults more than his peers. He has difficulty socializing with his peers and sharing. Sam demonstrates defiant behaviors in the classroom, which get in the way of his learning. Sam is a smart boy who is reading at a level A. However, his behaviors get in the way of his learning. He is currently working below grade level in math and writing. Sam is not able to write independently, he is most successful when tracing letters and numbers. Sam continues to work on listening and following directions in the classroom.
Anna (pseudonym) is an African American, five year old girl. She is a kindergartner in the classroom. Anna has a diagnosis of Intellectually Disabled. Anna has one sister at home. She lives with her sister, mother, grandmother, and grandfather. Anna struggles with defiant behaviors in the classroom and has difficulty communicating her wants and needs to both adults and peers. Anna is working below grade level in all academic areas. Anna has difficult retaining skills she has learned throughout the school year. She is not yet reading and she is not writing independently. She is most successful when tracing numbers and letters. Her behaviors have decreased significantly over the school year, she continues to work on transitions from activity to activity throughout her day.

Elsa (pseudonym) is a white, six year old girl. She is a first grader in the classroom. Elsa has a diagnosis of Intellectually Disabled. Elsa has one brother at home. She lives with her brother, mother, and father. Elsa is a smart and leader in the classroom. Elsa is always willing to help the teacher and be a role model for the other students. Elsa is still working below grade level in academic areas, however she has made significant gains in her learning this year. Elsa is reading at a level B. Elsa is working at a kindergarten level for writing and math. Elsa knows all her letters and sounds. Elsa is not demonstrating any defiant behaviors in the classroom this year. Elsa is moving to the 12:1:1 classroom next year, due to her accomplishment in academic achievements. Elsa follows and listens to directions in the classroom.

Michael (pseudonym) is a white, eight year old boy. He is a second grader in the classroom. Michael has a diagnosis of Autism. Michael has no siblings at home. Michael lives with dad and his cousin at home. Michael does not have many family members at home, it is just him and his dad. Most of his family lives out of the state. Michael is a non-verbal student who uses an IPAD as a communication device to communicate with adults and peers. Over the
school year, Michael began to imitate others and use spontaneous speech more often. Michael is still toilet training and has a 1:1 aide with him every day. Michael does not display aggressive or defiant behaviors towards adults or peers. Michael struggles with eating and is extremely picky in what he will eat. Michael is working at a kindergarten grade level academically. Michael is not yet reading. Michael listens and follows directions in the classroom.

Sarah (pseudonym) is a white female teacher aide in the classroom. Sarah has been working in the district for over 20 years. Sarah is teacher aide for the classroom of students with disabilities. Sarah has one son, two daughters, and a husband. Sarah’s one son has Down’s Syndrome and he is 32. Sarah’s other daughter is younger and she is going to school to be an Occupational Therapist. Lastly, her third daughter lives in Rochester where she works for Lifetime Assistance. With her own experience having a child with special needs, she brings many experiences and knowledge to the classroom. She has been very helpful in the classroom this school year.

Mary (pseudonym) is a white female teacher aide in the classroom. Mary has been working for the district for over 20 years as well. Mary is a 1:1 aide for a student in the classroom. She has one child of her own and two children who are adopted from Korea. Three of her grandchildren attend the elementary school. She also worked at BOCES before coming to the district. Mary has been very helpful in the classroom this year as well.

**Researcher Stance**

I am a graduate student who is attending St. John Fisher College in the School of Education. I am working on completing my Masters of Science in Literacy Education and certification in teaching students birth through twelfth grade. I currently hold my initial certification in Childhood Education in birth through sixth grade and Students with Disabilities
in birth through sixth grade. I earned my Bachelor’s degree in Childhood Education and Students with Disabilities with a minor in Interdisciplinary Studies form St. John Fisher College as well. As a researcher in this study, I acted as an active participant observer. I taught and observed my own teaching at the same time. Mills (2011) states, “When they are actively engaged in teaching, teachers observe the outcomes of their teaching. Each time we teach we monitor the effects of our teaching and adjust our instruction accordingly” (p. 75) Being an active participant observer happened for most of the study, however for a small portion I took on the role of privileged, active observer. A privileged, active observer is observing students during a time when the teacher is not directly teaching the lesson to the students. The teacher takes on the role as a “teacher aide” in the room, rather than teaching, they are supporting the students (Mills). I observed the students when I was not directly teaching, while the teacher aide was supporting an activity for the study. Mills explains, “Taking time to observe one’s class is a valuable use of nonteaching time that honors teacher’s effort to improve practice based, in part, on observational data (p. 75). Taking the time to observe the students allowed me to get a better picture of how students were doing in the classroom and gave me the opportunity to observe them not just academically, but their behaviors and actions while someone else was instructing.

**Method**

For the research study, I collected qualitative and quantitative data. I observed phonics skills within students with disabilities. Analyzing phonics skills within students with disabilities was accomplished by looking at different phonics strategies, formal observations, questionnaires, and collecting pre and post assessment data. In addition, all participants were video recorded and later transcribed to allow for validity and conformability of the data.
Throughout the research, the students were observed multiple times. The research and data collection took place over a course of two weeks. Within those weeks, the students met with in a group setting, one-on-one, and in a small group setting. The research took multiple observations and several recordings to complete. Taking student absences into account, it was important to make sure all portions of the research was complete. The Alphabet Action phonics strategy (Appendix A) was delivered whole group, however the syllable match (Appendix B), and blending match (Appendix C) was instructed one-on-one. It took more time to collect data and to interview each student (Appendix D) and the teacher aides (Appendix E).

When completing the Alphabet Action strategy, it took a total of three times, with each time being about five to 10 minutes. When completing the blending match on the computer, each student completed the activity for five minutes or four trails while I observed and took field notes. For the syllable match, it took about three to five minutes for each student to complete. Then an extra two minutes to take field notes on the activity completed. When interviewing each student individually, it took about two to three minutes to complete each interview. When completing the interview with the teacher aides, it took about 30 minutes each. Then I had to copy each pre and post assessment (Appendix F) for each student. Student work samples were collected from students throughout the year to demonstrate different phonic skills among the students. When adding all this time together, I spent approximately, two hours and 15 minutes to collect data.

**Quality and Credibility of Research**

The research collected was qualitative and quantitative research. The action research involved human participants. It was important to ensure the research was trustworthy. Mills (2011) cites the work of Cronbach and Meehl (1955) on the validity of quantitative research.
The parts of this action research that demonstrates quantitative research has validity. When the pre-test and post-test of the students were collected from the students this is quantitative data. According to Cronbach and Meehl (1955) two factors have to be considered when determining validity. Internal and external validity are considered when looking at quantitative research. The internal validity was discussed comparing it to the pre and post assessments. Then these results were compared to other research collected about phonics instruction confirming external validity.

On the other hand, Mills (2011) cites the work of Guba (1981) arguing that qualitative research could be addressed through credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. The qualitative data collected in this action research demonstrates these different criteria’s of Guba’s work. These criteria demonstrate trustworthiness for qualitative data collection.

Furthermore, the first criterion for trustworthiness is credibility. Mills (2011) explains, “The credibility of the study refers to the researcher’s ability to take into account the complexities that present themselves in a study and to deal with patterns that are not easily explained” (p. 104). There was an issue that came up in the study, however decreasing the amount of error was important. According to Mills (2011), “there should be prolonged participation at the study site” (p. 104). The research site I worked at was my own classroom I have been teaching at all year. By collecting and conducting research in my own classroom it reduced the opportunity for biases. In addition, Mills explains, “do peer debriefing to provide researchers with the opportunity to test their own growing” (p. 104). I have met with a critical colleagues almost every week to look over my data and writing. Meeting with my critical colleagues provided me insights and another look at my work I may have not thought of before. Thirdly, there should multiple forms of data collection, including artifacts, recordings, and
documents (Mills). I collected pre and post assessments, interview questions, questionnaires, student work samples, and recordings all ensuring credibility of the action research.

The second criterion for trustworthiness is transferability. Mills (2011) defines transferability as, “Qualitative researchers’ beliefs that everything is context bound and that the goal of their work is not to develop “truth” statements that can be generalized to larger groups of people. The research collected for this study was only true about the participants in the study and cannot be applied to others in a different study. I collected very specific data throughout my action research. I collected field notes, making observations, questionnaires, formal interviews, pre / post assessments and etc. Through the collection of detailed descriptive data it allowed for a comparison to other studies (Mills). By doing this detailed collection, it made the data transferable.

The third criterion for trustworthiness is dependability. Mills (2011) defines dependability as, “the stability of the data” (p. 104). The research and data collected had consistency and overlapped one another. The researcher collected quality data to make a strong argument. Mills (2011) states, “use two or more methods in such a way that the weakness of one is compensated by the strength of another” (p.104). I used multiple methods to collect data to ensure triangulation as well. I collected field notes, observations, recorded observations, and formal interviews. All of these methods are delivered individually to ensure overlapping. These methods are demonstrating dependability for the research collection of the study.

Moreover, the last criterion for trustworthiness is confirmability. Mills (2011) defines confirmability as, “the neutrality or objectivity of the data that has been collected” (p. 105). Confirmability means there are no opinions involved with the data collection to influence to argument one way or another. To ensure that I did not influence the data or results of the action
research, I practiced triangulation. According to Mills (2011), he defines triangulation as, “a variety of data sources and different methods are compared with one another to cross-check data” (p. 105). I collected a variety of sources in my research. I collected pre / post assessments, formal interviews, questionnaires, recorded observations, field notes, observations, and student work. The variety of sources ensured there was confirmability for the study.

**Informed Consent and Protecting the Rights of the Participants**

Before the data collection was started for the research portion of the study, I verbally asked all the parents in the class if they would give permission to allow their child to take part in the study. Once the parents gave verbal consent, I provided the parents with the written parental permission form to sign and look over. I filled out all the information about the study. I explained the study to the parents and gave a copy of the parental permission form to the parents to keep. All of the parents in the classroom gave parental consent for their child to take part in the study. In addition, I asked the students in the classroom if they would be willing to take part in the study as well. Since all the students in the class are below third grade, I received verbal assent from each student. Lastly, the teacher aides who are participating in the study, I first received verbal consent from them to participate in the study. Then, I provided them with an informed consent form used for adults. Each teacher aide was explained the different components of the study. I gave each teacher aide a copy to keep for themselves as well. All participants in the study were informed their names were anonymous in the study (pseudonyms) and that identifying marks were removed from their artifacts.

**Data Collection**

The first data collection I collected was pre / post assessments. The pre / post assessments were given at the beginning and the end of the school year to the students. The
assessments tell the teacher what the student knows coming into the classroom and what they have learned after being taught throughout the school year. These assessments are linked to the teacher’s APPR scores of rating. These assessments are meant to show growth over the school year and hope that each student has increased their scores by the end of the year. The reason for collecting these results was to look at student growth over the year and to compare students’ phonics skills in the beginning of the year to the end of the year. In addition, then I looked at the reading assessment for students to see their growth and compare the results to the phonics strategies used for this study.

The second data collection was student formal interviews. These interviews were delivered individually to ensure the most valid answers from each participant. The purpose of the interviews was to collect knowledge on the alphabet, syllables, and blends. The interviews gave me another view on how the students understand phonics skills.

The third data collection was questionnaires from teacher aides in the classroom. I asked the teacher aides to respond to 10 pre-written questions. If the teacher aides had any additional comments, there was a space for them to provide their comments. Once, they had completed the questions, I followed up with them on their questions, asking clarifying questions. I asked questions to make sure I understood their answers.

The fourth data collection was recorded observations and observations on the phonics strategies Alphabet Action, Blending Match, and Syllable Match. Alphabet Action is a series of alphabet cards paired with sign language actions. Alphabet Action helps students who are struggling to remember the alphabet pair an action with the alphabet letter and sound, to make learning the alphabet a little easier. The strategy has been used with the class throughout the whole school year, however I took a closer look at the strategy. The strategy took three sessions
of about five to 10 minutes. Blending Match is a phonics strategy on the computer. The students had to listen to the sounds produced first, then blend the sounds together and click on the correct picture. The students completed the activity for four trials. I took observation notes (field notes) while the students completed the activity. Lastly, the syllable match is a phonics strategy where I say sounds of a word and the pictures are presented in front of the students. The students have to correctly blend the word together, point to the correct picture, and tell me how many syllables are in the word. I collected this data on a chart for student work samples. I analyzed the observations (field notes) and recordings taken from this data collection.

Lastly, I collected student work samples, of work the students had completed throughout the school year. These collections allowed me to analyze their phonics skills over the school year and how the instruction had impacted their learning. The other data collections ensured validity, credibility, transformability, dependability, and conformability that all the data collected was demonstrating that phonics skills can be improve when given a variety of interventions and intense instruction.

Data Analysis

After collecting all my data, I first made copies of all the data I had. I wanted to have multiple copies of the data, so I was able to read through the data without having a lot of writing on the papers each time. After making copies, I was able to read through my data for the first time. My first read through the data, I wrote down notes about what I noticed and possible questions I had. I went through each piece of data, page by page. Right away I started to notice similarities across the data. I caught myself looking at multiple pieces at one time trying to make connections between the data. However, I stopped myself because I wanted the first read through to be about just what I noticed and the second time to be the coding process. I made
comments on every piece of data, so the second read through I would remember what I had read before.

On the second read through, I worked on coding the data. I started to connect the data together to see where they may link together. When coding the data I used a pen and yellow highlighter on all data pieces. I wrote single phrases to make it easier when I went back to create themes across the data. I also used my first copy of data collection to help with coding the data. More specially to look at the notes I had written on each data piece. When coding the data, I pulled pieces of data together. I looked at the pre assessment / post assessment scores for letter / sound recognition, blending, and syllables with Alphabet Action strategy. I also looked at pre/assessment and post assessment scores with the Syllable Match strategy. The reason for the assessment pieces was quantitative data, making it easier to analyze together. Where the other pieces were qualitative data and were straight forward. For example, the field notes from the Blend Match strategy, the teacher aide questionnaires, student formal interviews, and observation notes from Alphabet Action strategy. After coding the data, I started to notice links between data and similarities.

Therefore, coding led into themes within the data. On my third time reading through the data, I was looking for themes and anything to add to conclude what I had already found. When reading the third time through, I used a pen and a pink highlighter to distinguish the themes across the data. The reoccurring themes / phrases that kept reoccurring across the data were intense, skill drill, listened, mastery, additional support, visual, hands-on, more support, differentiation, phonics is important, engaging, and interactive. From these key phrases across the data, the three themes that came out of the data were identifying phonics skills early, performance from phonics strategies, and impact from classroom environment.
Findings and Discussion

There are many students who enter school not knowing their basic phonics skills. More importantly, when they begin to learn phonics skills they have not mastered the skill they have learned before. They start to learn to read and then realize, they are lacking the phonological awareness to become a successful reader. These skills are most difficult for any student, especially a student with a disability. This research aimed to look at different phonics strategies to help students with disabilities become more successful towards reading. The research compared three different strategies to see which one would increase students’ phonics skills in letter / sound recognition, blending, and identifying syllables. The study looked at pre / post assessment scores (Appendix F) from three different sections. In addition, three phonics strategies were used throughout the study to see if the students would be able to increase their phonics skills, based off their pre assessment scores. The phonics strategies were Alphabet Action (Appendix A), Blending Match (Appendix C), and Syllable Match (Appendix B). The students and teacher aides in the classroom were interviewed as well (Appendix D & E). The following findings are presented through three themes: identifying phonics skills early, performance from phonics strategies, and impact from classroom environment. The discussion of these themes explores the improvement of phonics skills; letter / sound recognition, blending, and identifying syllables and how the students were able to make the improvement.

Identifying Phonics Skills Early

The students demonstrated their initial knowledge of letters and sounds (alphabet), blending, and identifying syllables through their pre assessment at the beginning of the school year. These assessment scores were taken early on in the year and gave insight to what the students knew before starting more phonics based instruction. When students enter school,
teachers are not going to know the abilities of their students. They quickly learn the abilities of their students through assessment and progress monitoring. It is critical to getting to know students early on to know where students’ skills are and where to begin instructing them. When teachers have a starting point for instruction with students, it is easier to get students the help they need along the way. In addition, if the students’ skills regress or progress over the year, the teacher is tracking the data as the year goes on. Meisels and Xue (2004) state phonics instruction is effective for all students no matter what their ability level may be. It has proven to be effective for all students at all different level. Snider (2001) confirms phonemic awareness is very important to a student’s reading achievement later on. Phonemic awareness sets the foundation for reading for a student. Collecting pre assessment scores was crucial to know how the students’ skills progressed. Most of the students were able to make progress with all of these skills by the end of the year. In addition, when comparing the formal interviews to the pre assessments, most of the students had an understanding of letters and sounds, blending, and identifying syllables.

Tables 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 show the pre assessment scores of the students. It demonstrates how the students were able to identify uppercase and lowercase letters and sounds. It shows how students identified syllables when clapping a word. The table shows how students were assessed on blending parts of words together and listening to sounds in words and blending them together. Lastly, the table shows how students listened to words and identified the sounds in the words. Letter / sound recognition, blending, and identifying syllables were a small part of the pre assessment, but these components are what the study focused on. The pre assessment scores were used to see the progress students made after being introduced to the phonics strategies and
their growth to the end of the school year. In addition, the formal interviews (Appendix D) with each student are compared to their pre assessment scores.

Michael struggled with the pre assessment at the beginning of the school year. Michael is a non-verbal student who has Autism. He is a second grader who is working at a Kindergarten level. He uses an IPAD as a way of communication with others. Throughout the year, he started to demonstrate more spontaneous speech and was imitating adults’ language. According to Table 1 taken from pre assessment scores (Appendix F), Michael was only able to identify letters A, B, C, and O. Michael used his IPAD to identify letters and sounds. He was not able to identify any lowercase letters or sounds. He was able to clap syllables in popcorn, juice, and cucumber. He could only blend the parts in do-nut. When listening to sounds and blending parts together he was not successful. In addition, he was not able to listen to words and identify the sounds in the words as well.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th># Correct</th>
<th>#Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identified Uppercase Letters</td>
<td>A, B, C, O</td>
<td>4/26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identified Lowercase Letters</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>0/26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identified Sounds</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>0/26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clapped Syllables</td>
<td>popcorn, juice, cucumber</td>
<td>3/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blend Parts</td>
<td>do-nut</td>
<td>1/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listened to sounds and blend</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>0/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen to words and identify sounds</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>0/3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. # Correct = Number student identified on the question and # Total = total possible points for the question
Michael was only able to identify letters A, B, C, and O. He is demonstrating weak knowledge of letters even when he used his IPAD. He may be lacking these skills due to regression over the summer and he has not had intense instruction since the last school year. He was not able to identify any lowercase letters or sounds. Michael had very limited knowledge of uppercase letters and was not retaining letters and sounds. He may not be demonstrating the knowledge of lowercase letters and sounds because he has not mastered uppercase letters yet. When asking Michael what letters are he responded, “What are letters?” (Formal Interview, June 2015). Michael imitated the teachers question and was not understanding what he was being asked. He was able to demonstrate uppercase letters on his IPAD visually, however verbally Michael was not successful in answer this question. Being a non-verbal student this was confusing to Michael and he had difficulty understanding what was being asked of him. He may not be able to demonstrate verbally what letters mean, however using his IPAD he may be more successful because it is visual and hands-on. He responded the same way when asked about sounds. Michael said, “What are sounds?” (Formal Interview, June 2015). Michael was also confused about what was being asked of him. He was only able to imitate the teacher’s question. This was a verbal question and there were not visual cues to help Michael to answer the question. However, Michael was not able to identify sounds on his pre-assessment either, so I think he truly did not understand what sounds were when being asked. Meisels and Xue (2004) state phonics instruction is effective for all students no matter what their ability level may be. It has proven to be effective for all students at all different levels.

Furthermore, when asked to clap syllables in words, Michael was successful at this skill on the pre assessment. Clapping syllables was a hands-on activity therefore, it did not require a verbal response from Michael. He was able to clap the syllables in the words, using a hands on
approach. Michael had a word modeled for him and then, he was successful at clapping the other words. It may have been successful for him when he was given a model, than when asked verbal questions with no model. Michael clapped syllables in popcorn, juice, and cucumber. Michael was asked the question, what are syllables and he said “What are…..and mumbled” (Formal Interview, 2015). In addition, when he was asked how he learned syllables this year, he said, “How did learn syllables” (Formal Interview, June 2015). Michael was not successful with answering these questions because he may had to give a verbal response.

Lastly, Michael demonstrated he was only able to blend the parts do-nut together on the pre assessment. Michael was not able to listen to sounds and blend them together or listen to words and identify the sounds within the word. Listening and sounds are related to speech. Michael has significant speech delays which might have made these tasks extremely difficult for him to understand and perform. When Michael was asked about the process of blending, he said, “How do we blend year? When he was asked about the question how did you learn to blend this year, he said, “How….mumbled” (Formal Interview, June 2015). Michael is demonstrating he is not able to listen to sounds and blend them together. He is not able to show this through the pre assessment or formal interview. It was critical Michael was assessed early because it shows Michael was very weak in phonics skills at the beginning of the school year and needed to be provided intense instruction throughout the school year. However, Michael was not successful on the formal interview. The formal interview was a verbal assessment and was difficult measurement for Michael because he is a non-verbal student. Michael was able to demonstrate his knowledge of phonics skills in other ways. The formal interview was confusing and was not an effective tool of Michael’s understanding of letter / sounds, blending, and syllables. Lane and Oslick (2014) explain reading assessments in the classroom can help with identifying students
early on and especially students who are struggling so teachers can provide different and
effective ways to modify instruction. If teachers are able to identify students early who are
struggling and have a disability, teachers will be able to get those students the additional help
they need. After analyzing Michael’s pre assessment scores and formal interview, it was
important to assess his skills early on and to continue to assess his skills throughout the school
year.

Anna was a little more successful with the pre assessment at the beginning of the school
year. Anna has a disability of Speech Impairment. She is in Kindergarten, but working below
grade level. According to Table 2 taken from pre assessment scores (Appendix F), Anna was
only able to identify letters A, E, T. She was not able to identify any lowercase letters or sounds.
She was able to clap syllables in juice and cucumber. She could only blend the parts in do-nut
and to-ma-to. When listening to sounds and blending parts together she was successful in
blending sounds and identifying sounds in words.

Table 2
Anna’s Pre Assessment Scores for Letters/Sounds, Blending, and Syllables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th># Correct</th>
<th>#Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identified Uppercase Letters</td>
<td>A, E, T</td>
<td>3/26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identified Lowercase Letters</td>
<td>Said “e” and “y” for all</td>
<td>0/26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identified Sounds</td>
<td>Said “e” and “y” for all</td>
<td>0/26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clapped Syllables</td>
<td>juice, cucumber</td>
<td>2/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blend Parts</td>
<td>do-nut, to-ma-to</td>
<td>2/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listened to sounds and blend</td>
<td>/l//o//l/x/, /l//a//l/p/, /p//i//l/g/</td>
<td>3/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen to words and identify sounds</td>
<td>cat, fun, bed</td>
<td>3/3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. # Correct = Number student identified on the question and # Total = total possible points for the question
According to Table 2 taken from pre assessment scores (Appendix F), Anna was only able to identify letters A, E, and T. It may be because it was early in the year and she is not knowledgeable about letters yet. When identifying lowercase letters and sounds all Anna said was “y” and “e” for all letters and sounds. She may be confused because she has not mastered uppercase letters. At this point in the year, she may have not been able to identify lowercase letters and sounds. When asking Anna what letters are she responded, “N” (Formal Interview, June 2015). Anna could be showing she knew a letter of the alphabet by saying the letter “n.” However, since she was only able to give one example of the letter. She may have been guessing and answering the question. Even though, Anna was only able to give one example, she may still have understood what letters were. When being asked what sounds were Anna said, “Sssss?” (Formal Interview, June 2015). Anna may have realized letter and sounds are connected. Anna was able to produce the sound for letter “s”. She demonstrated she knew what a sound was. Therefore, she could have realized sounds are different than letters and distinguishing that in her answer. Ahlgrim-Delzell, Baker, Browder, Flowers and Spooner (2010) state, “students with disabilities should be given opportunities to increase access to literature and increase independence as readers” (p. 510). All students have a right to become readers, and teachers can help students by building their phonics skills early.

Furthermore, when asked to clap syllables in words, she scored a two of three on the pre assessment. Anna clapped syllables in juice and cucumber. Anna may have been successful with clapping the syllables because it was hands-on and she was given a model. When Anna was asked about syllables she said “N, O, P” (Formal Interview, June 2015). Anna could not demonstrate her knowledge of syllables and the reason for this may be because it was a verbal response and did not give her multiple ways to answer the question. In addition, when she was
asked how she learned syllables this year, she said “N, O, P” (Formal Interview, June 2015). Again, verbally asking Anna, the question about syllables may have been confusing to her and since there were not multiple ways for her to answer the question, she may have not understood what was being asked of her. Many students with disabilities may have barriers that may not allow them to perform well on an assessment, when in fact they do know the material being presented to them. Students may not have verbal skills or the expressive skills to demonstrate their cognitive abilities. However, these students may be able to explain their knowledge and skills in other ways. This does not mean they are going to fall farther behind (Spooner, 2010).

Lastly, Anna demonstrated she was only able to blend the parts do-nut and to-ma-to together on the pre assessment. She may have been able to blend these two words because do-nut has one syllable in the word. In addition, she may have been able to blend to-ma-to because the word is common and she recognized the sounds. Anna was able to listen to sounds and blend them together. She blended the sounds in fox, tap, and pig together. Anna listened to the words cat, fun, and bed. She was able to identify the sounds in the words. When she was asked about the process of blending she said “U” and how she learned about it this year, she said, “N, O, P” (Formal Interview, June 2015). Even though, Anna knew how to listen and blends words and blend sounds in words together, she was not able to explain about blending. Anna may had benefitted from the hands-on approach to demonstrating her knowledge about blending. However, when she was asked about the question, she could have not been successful because it was a verbal response. Anna being a student with a Speech Impairment, she has difficulties with listening and identifying sounds. These skills make it much harder for her to understand and comprehend. Campbell (2015) states, “focus on explicit instruction of phoneme manipulation could disadvantage children who have not grasped the phonological insights that spoken
language can be broken up to syllable units” (p. 19). For students who have speech impairments or difficulty identifying sounds within a word, identifying phonemes and syllables can be difficult for students, especially students with disabilities; even more so preschool students who are not developmentally ready. It is important to make sure students who struggle with these skills, to master them first before moving onto new skills. After analyzing Anna’s pre assessment scores and formal interview, it was important to assess her skills early on and to continue to assess her skills throughout the school year.

Sam was a little more successful with the pre assessment at the beginning of the school year than Anna and Michael. Sam has a disability of Other Health Impairment. Sam is in Kindergarten, but working below grade level. After analyzing Sam’s pre assessment scores and formal interview, it was important to assess his skills early on and to continue to assess his skills throughout the school year. According to Table 3 taken from pre assessment scores (Appendix F), Sam was able to identify letters F, L, M, N, O, and Q. He was only able to identify “m” for lowercase letters and sounds. He was able to clap syllables in juice and popcorn. He could blend the parts in do-nut, to-ma-to, and ba-na-na. When listening to sounds and blending parts together he blended fox and pig together. He was not able to listen to words and identify the sounds.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th># Correct</th>
<th>#Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identified Uppercase Letters</td>
<td>F, L, M, N, O, Q</td>
<td>6/26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identified Lowercase Letters</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>1/26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identified Sounds</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>1/26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clapped Syllables</td>
<td>juice, popcorn</td>
<td>2/3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to Table 3 taken from pre assessment scores (Appendix F), Sam was able to identify uppercase letters F, L, M, N, O, and Q. Sam may be demonstrating he knows the letters because those are the letters he has mastered at the beginning of the school year. On the other hand, Sam may not be able to identify more uppercase letters at this point due to regression of his skills over the summer. When identifying lowercase letters and sounds Sam was only able to identify “m”. Since Sam did not know many uppercase letters, he may have had a difficult time identifying lowercase letters and sounds because he did not even know all uppercase letters yet. Sam was on his way to knowing more uppercase letters than lowercase letters and sounds on the pre assessment. When asking Sam what letters are he responded, “P, O, S, T” (Formal Interview, June 2015). Sam could have been able to give so many examples of letters because he truly knew what letters were. When being asked what sounds were Sam said, “p..p..p?” (Formal Interview, June 2015). Sam was able to produce the sound for letter “p”. He demonstrated he knew what a sound was. Sam may have been able to produce sounds because at this point in the year he had been practicing and receiving more instruction on sounds. On the other hand, at the beginning of the year, he did not know his sounds. Sam could be benefitting from instruction and retaining skills throughout the year.

Furthermore, when asked to clap syllables in words, he scored a two of three on the pre assessment. Sam clapped syllables in popcorn and juice. Sam could have been able to identify the syllables in the words due to they are only one and two syllable words. In addition, to identify the syllables it was a more hands-on approach. The approach may have helped Sam in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies Improving Phonics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blend Parts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>do-nut, to-ma-to, ba-na-na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listened to sounds and blend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/f//o//x/, /p//i//g/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen to words and identify sounds</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
identifying the syllables in words. When Sam was asked about syllables he said “Kind of bugs” (Formal Interview, June 2015). Sam might have answered the question like this because it was one of the last questions asked of him and he was losing interest in the interview. However, he may have not been able to give a verbal explanation of what syllables were. In addition, when he was asked how he learned syllables this year, he said “Mrs. K is here” (Formal Interview, June 2015). The question in the interview may have been confusing to him to Sam. He was also losing interest in the interview because these questions were the last questions that were asked. Sam may not have been focused and able to give a verbal explanation for how he learned syllables throughout the year.

Lastly, Sam demonstrated he was able to blend the parts in do-nut, to-ma-to, and ba-na-na together on the pre assessment. After listening to these words spoken to Sam, he may have been able to blend all three of the words because they are common words he may be aware of. In addition, he could have recognized the sounds and put them together easily. Sam was able to listen to sounds and blend them together. He blended the sounds in fox and pig together. The reason Sam was able to blend these words together because the word may have sounded familiar to him. Sam did not have to produce the sounds, he just had to listen. Sam may had been successful with this skill because he did not have to produce the sounds on his own. Sam listened to the words cat, fun, and bed. He was not able to identify the sounds in the words. Sam may have not been able to identify the sounds in the words because he was not able to produce any sounds on his pre-assessment. Without knowing any sounds yet, this could be why Sam was not able to identify the sounds in the words cat, fun, and bed. When he was asked about the process of blending he said “when we hide” and how she learned about it this year, he said, “Because we want to be safe” (Formal Interview, June 2015). Sam could have been confused
about these questions because he had to give a verbal explanation and he was not able to demonstrate his knowledge of this in another way. In addition, his answers may reflect his loss of interest throughout the interview because these questions were at the end of the interview.

After analyzing the data it is important that Sam was assessed early. It shows Sam was weak in phonics skills at the beginning of the school year and needed to be provided intense instruction throughout the school year. Sam was on his way to learning his uppercase letter, however he needed more intense instruction with lowercase letters and sounds. In addition, he was weak on identifying sounds, blending sounds together, and identifying syllables. Ahlgrim-Delzell, Baker, Browder, Flowers and Spooner (2010) state, “meta-analysis suggest that phonics should be taught early. Teaching phonics at an early age can be beneficial to other reading skills such as vocabulary and text comprehension” (p. 509). Research has proven that phonics should be taught early on for students.

Elsa did fairly well on her pre assessment, however she had room for growth. Elsa had room to master her phonics skills throughout the school year. Elsa has a disability of Intellectual Disabled. She is in First Grade, but working below grade level. According to Table 4 taken from pre assessment scores (Appendix F), Elsa was able to identify most uppercase letters. She was able to identify 15 lowercase letters and no sounds. She was able to clap syllables in popcorn. She could blend the parts in do-nut, to-ma-to, and ba-na-na. When listening to sounds and blending parts together she blended fox, tap, and pig together. She was able to listen to words and identify the sounds in cat, fun, and bed. Elsa is on the right path to mastery phonics skills. With more instruction and repetition, she will be able to demonstrate these skills fluently.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th># Correct</th>
<th>#Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Elsa’s Pre Assessment Scores for Letters/Sounds, Blending, and Syllables
|...|...|...|...|...|
According to Table 4 taken from pre assessment scores (Appendix F), Elsa was able to identify letters most uppercase letters. She almost showed mastery. She could have been showing mastery of uppercase letters because she already had a year of learning alphabet letters. On the other hand, she could be retaining skills from year to year. When identifying lowercase letters she demonstrated knowing a little more than half. She could have been able to identify these letters due to she already knew almost all of her uppercase letters and she was able to make connections between both. However, when identifying sounds Elsa said “I don’t know.” Elsa could not understand and was not able to correctly identify sounds. She could be confused on what was being asked of her. In addition, she could be showing regression from the previous school year. When asking Elsa what letters were she responded, “The ABC’s alphabet” (Formal Interview, June 2015). Elsa may be demonstrating she knows what letters are because she already has a knowledge of uppercase letters and some lowercase letters. She was not able to give a specific example of a letter, however she may be understanding the alphabet are letters. When being asked what sounds were Elsa said, “A, B, C, D, E” (Formal Interview, June 2015).
She demonstrated she did not know what sounds were. Elsa’s answer could be linked to that she was not able to identify sounds on her pre-assessment. In addition, Elsa could still not understand what the word “sounds” means. Meaning, she is able to produce sounds, however when asked to give a verbal explanation of sounds, she is not able to do so. When asked what are letters used for? Elsa said “Can’t see letters, then can’t listen to the alphabet” (Formal Interview, June 2015). Elsa’s answers could be a connection explaining that letters and sounds are connected. What she could mean by her answer is that if you do not know or are not able to listen to the alphabet, then it will make it difficult to identify sounds.

Furthermore, when asked to clap syllables in words, she scored a one out of three on the pre assessment. Elsa clapped syllables in popcorn. Elsa could have not been successful in identifying syllables in the other words because she was trying with hearing the sounds. Since, Elsa did not know her sounds, she could very easily have struggled with the assessment. When Elsa was asked about syllables she said “loud, clap as loud” (Formal Interview, June 2015). She was showing the process of how to identify syllables in a word. She may know the process of how to identify syllables, however she could still not understand or be successful in identifying syllables in a word. In addition, when she was asked how she learned syllables this year, she said “from Mrs. S” (Formal Interview, June 2015). Elsa may have been applying her knowledge of syllables to another academic area within her school day. She could have been applying what she learned in another class to what she was being assessed on. She did know what syllables were and how she learned them throughout the year. She was able to apply how she learned them outside of the classroom from another teacher.

Lastly, Elsa demonstrated she was able to blend the parts of the words do-nut, to-ma-to, and ba-na-na together on the pre assessment. Elsa was able to listen to sounds and blend them
together. She may have been successful with blending the words together because she just had to listen to the sounds and put them together. Elsa did not have to produce the sounds on her own. She blended the sounds in fox, tap, and pig together. These are basic CVC words making it easier for her to blend sounds together. Elsa could have also blended the words because the words were familiar to her. Elsa listened to the words cat, fun, and bed. There is really no reason why Elsa may have been able to identify the sounds in the words. There was no connection because she demonstrated she did not know sounds on the pre-assessment, however she was able to identify the sounds in the words. She may have needed models or words given to her first before she was able to produce sounds. However, to produce sounds from memory, she was not able to do. When she was asked about the process of blending she said “fingers” and how she learned about it this year, she said, “from you” (Formal Interview, June 2015). Elsa was demonstrating she knew the process of how to blend. Although, she could still be unsure about how to blend sounds together from her answer given. In addition, she was honest in the way she learned how to blend this year. However, she could still be confused about the process. After analyzing this data, it shows Elsa is somewhat proficient in phonics skills at the beginning of the school year. With more instruction throughout the year, she will be able to master these skills and become a more successful reader. Meisels and Xue (2004) state, “Phonics instruction is clearly important in learning to read, because a major task facing beginning readers is to “crack the code” or figure out how the alphabetic system of the English language works” (p. 219).

After analyzing Elsa’s pre assessment scores and formal interview, it was important to assess her skills early on and to continue to assess her skills throughout the school year.

Joe was fluent on his pre assessment, however he had room for growth. Out of all the students, he performed the best on his pre assessment. However, by collecting this data it gave a
direction on where to begin to instruct him and to build a stronger foundation to help him to become a stronger reader. Joe is in First Grade and has a diagnosis of Speech Impairment. He is working on grade level. According to Table 5 taken from pre assessment scores (Appendix F), Joe was able to identify all uppercase letters He was only able to identify most lowercase letters and sounds. He was able to clap syllables in juice, popcorn and cucumber. He could blend the parts in do-nut, to-ma-to, and ba-na-na. When listening to sounds and blending parts together he blended fox, tap, and pig together. He was able to listen to words and identify the sounds in cat and bed. Joe is on the right path to mastery phonic skills. With more instruction and repetition, he will be able to demonstrate these skills fluently.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th># Correct</th>
<th># Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identified Lowercase Letters</td>
<td>a, b, c, d, e, f, h, i, j, k, l, m, n, o, p, r, s, t, u, v, w, x, y, z</td>
<td>24/26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identified Sounds</td>
<td>/a/, /b/, /c/, /d/, /e/, /f/, /h/, /i/, /j/, /k/ /l/, /m/, /n/, /o/, /p/, /r/, /s/, /t/, /u/, /v/, /w/, /x/, /y/, /z/</td>
<td>24/26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clapped Syllables</td>
<td>popcorn, juice, cucumber</td>
<td>3/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blend Parts</td>
<td>do-nut, to-ma-to, ba-na-na</td>
<td>3/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listened to sounds and blend</td>
<td>/fl//ol//x/, /fl//al//pl/, /pl//i//g/</td>
<td>3/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen to words and identify sounds</td>
<td>cat, bed</td>
<td>2/3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. # Correct = Number student identified on the question and # Total = total possible points for the question
According to Table 5 taken from pre assessment scores (Appendix F), Joe was able to identify letters all uppercase letters. He showed mastery. It is quite possible he is showing mastery because he has been learning the alphabet longer and he is now able to retain the skills from year to year. When identifying lowercase letters he demonstrated knowing almost all lowercase letters. Now that Joe demonstrated mastery with uppercase letters, it could be he has the skills to retain lowercase letters as well. In addition, the instruction and support he is receiving with letters, could be beneficial to him. When identifying sounds Joe knew all but two sounds. Joe was able to identify uppercase and lowercase letter. Since he knew both, I think he was successful at identifying the sounds associated with the letters. This assessment indicated he had a very good grasp on letters and sounds. However, he was not quite to mastery. When asking Joe what letters were he responded, “umm, to count” (Formal Interview, June 2015). Joe could have been confused by the assessment because it was a verbal assessment and did not all for visual or hands-on models. Joe was not able demonstrate he understood what letters were. Since Joe was not able to answer the question correctly, it led me to think he did not understand the question being asked. When being asked what sounds were Joe said, “Like this /s/ /a/ /t/ sat” (Formal Interview, June 2015). Joe could have been able to demonstrate the sounds within a CVC word because he already knew most of his sounds and he was a reader. Joe was the only student who was able to give examples of sounds within a word. Joe almost had all of his sounds and letters mastered. After finishing the interview with Joe, he was able to understand the rest of the questions.

Furthermore, when asked to clap syllables in words, he scored a three out of three on the pre assessment. Joe may have been successful with clapping syllables in words because it was a hands-on activity, but also he already knew his sounds. Therefore, by clapping it helped him to
figure out the correct number of syllables in the words. Joe clapped syllables in popcorn, juice, and cucumber. When Joe was asked about syllables he said “ap-ple” clapping at the same time (Formal Interview, June 2015). Joe was demonstrating he knew the process of how to identify syllables in a word and pronouncing the syllables in the word apple. He may have known this skill at the beginning of the school year; however he was able to demonstrate using his hands and explain himself at the same time. The instruction Joe received throughout the school year could have helped him to do this. In addition, when he was asked how he learned syllables this year, he said “Took a lot of practice” (Formal Interview, June 2015). Joe could have realized he was not proficient in this skill in the beginning of the year and was able to identify he practiced this skill a lot throughout the school year. In addition, he may have realized how much he learned throughout the school year and now he is able to demonstrate he knows what syllables are.

Lastly, Joe demonstrated he was able to blend the parts of the words do-nut, to-ma-to, and ba-na-na together on the pre assessment. He may have been successful with blending the words together because he just had to listen to the sounds and put them together. He did not have to produce the sounds on his own. On the other hand, he may have been able to blend them together because he was familiar with the words and the sounds. Joe was able to listen to sounds and blend them together. He blended the sounds in fox, tap, and pig together. These are basic CVC words making it easier for him to blend sounds together. Joe could have also blended the words because the words were familiar to him and he was able to read. Joe listened to the words cat, fun, and bed. Joe was able to identify sounds in two of the words, however he may have been able to do this because these sounds were familiar to him. He may have needed more models to successfully identify more sounds in the words. He was able to identify the sounds in the words cat and bed, however he was not able to for fun. When he was asked about the
process of blending he said “I put together a sound” and how he learned about it this year, he said, “I do this /a/ /p/ /p/ /l/ /e/” (Formal Interview, June 2015). Joe could be showing he knows the process of blending and how he put sounds together because he learned this throughout the school year. In addition, through intense instruction throughout the year with the skill of blending, he may have benefitted from the instruction because he was able to explain the process of blending and how he learned it this year. After analyzing the data, it shows Joe is proficient in phonics skills at the beginning of the school year. With more instruction throughout the year, he might be able to master these skills and become a more successful reader. Snider (2001) explains, “There is a cause-effect relationship between phonemic awareness and reading achievement” (p. 203). Thus meaning, if students are able to get phonics instruction early on they will most likely become successful readers. Setting up a foundation will create success for students later.

With the wide range of skills in the classroom, it is important to meet every one of their needs. More importantly, it is important to constantly monitor and assess their needs to make sure they are progressing with their skills. McIntyre, Petrosko and Rightmeyer, (2006) state, “we recommend much attention be given to individual assessment of children’s reading skills and concepts and consideration of the instruction that matches those needs” (p. 228). By meeting the needs of the individual student, it is differentiating for all students, instead of following a specific curriculum that may not meet the needs of students with disabilities. Therefore, by putting strategies and interventions into place for these students it will help to increase their phonics skills.

**Performance from Phonics Strategies**
There were three phonics strategies chosen for this research study. The three phonics strategies were Alphabet Action (Appendix A), Blending Match (Appendix C) and Syllable Match (Appendix B). These three strategies were purposefully chosen due to assess the students’ progression and achievement in three areas, letter / sound recognition, blending, and identifying syllables. Nichols and Rupley (2009) explain, struggling readers are more likely to learn essential reading skills and strategies if the direct or explicit model of instruction is part of the teacher’s repertoire of teaching methods. These strategies were intensive and delivered in a one to one or small group setting to the students. It provided for the most individualized teaching and to meet all the needs of the students.

Alphabet Action (Appendix A) is a letter / sound phonics skill strategy. This strategy teaches students the letter along with the sound, including a picture and an action. The action with the sound and letter is sign language based. This strategy is interactive and hands-on for the students. In addition, all the letters and sounds are printed on cards for the students to visually look at when teaching this strategy. This strategy is best taught and instructed in a small group and one on one setting. It is best for students to learn the letters and sounds to their own mastery. However, when first becoming comfortable with this intervention is best to learn from a model (a teacher or a peer). Once, students have mastered this strategy they can use this intervention to peer teach each other the alphabet and sounds. This strategy can be used across grade levels to make teaching more universal.

The following information below in Tables 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 shows the performance from the Alphabet Action strategy (Appendix A). This strategy was started after the pre assessment was given at the beginning of the school year and was used throughout the whole school year. This strategy was modeled and instructed by myself and the teacher aides in the classroom.
Towards the end of the school year, the students were able to instruct the strategy to each other. When taking on the role as a passive active researcher, I had the opportunity to take field notes on the observations I saw while the students were completing this activity. The students were engaged, asking questions, looking both at the letters and pictures, saying sounds and letters together, paying attention, signing actions, and participating (observation notes, June 2015).

When taking a step backing and watching the students complete this activity, it was amazing to see their progress and engagement throughout the time. The students truly enjoyed this strategy and it was meaningful to them.

Table 6 demonstrates Michael’s performance from the first phonics strategy Alphabet Action (Appendix A). The table shows his scores from the pre-assessment to show how he made progress after the phonics strategy was delivered. On the pre-assessment he was not able to identify any lowercase letters or sounds. He was able to identify uppercase letters A, B, C, O.

Michael made significant improvements from the pre-assessment to after the phonics strategy on the post-assessment. The “y” on the table stands for yes the student made improvements or the “n” stands for no the student did not make improvements.

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre Assessment</th>
<th>Post Assessment</th>
<th>Y or N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>a, c, d, e, g, h, j, k, l, m, n, o, p, r, s, t, u, v, w, x, y, z</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>/d/ /m/ /n/ /r/ /s/ /w/ /y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Y= yes made improvement / N=no did not make improvement
Pre-assessment=uppercase and lowercase letters, and sounds / Post assessment= uppercase and lowercase letter and sounds
According to Table 6 taken from pre-assessment and post-assessment scores after completing the phonics strategy Alphabet Action, Michael was able to make improvements after the strategy. On the pre-assessment Michael was able only able to identify A, B, C, and O. However, after Alphabet Action, he was able to identify A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, J, K, L, M, N, O, P, Q, R, S, T, U, V, W, X, Y, Z on his post assessment. Michael was able to make improvements after being instructed with Alphabet Action. Michael may have been successful with identifying more uppercase letters because the strategy was visual, hands-on, and repetitive. Once Michael was familiar with the phonics strategy, he was able to practice the strategy over and over. By practicing his letters over and over, Michael could have had a chance to retain his letters to mastery. On the pre-assessment Michael was not able to identify any lowercase letters. After using the Alphabet Action strategy, on the post assessment, he was able to identify lowercase letters a, c, d, e, g, h, j, k, l, m, n, o, p, r, s, t, u, v, w, x, y, and z. Again, Michael could have been successful with lowercase letters after Alphabet Action because both lowercase letters and uppercase letters are displayed visually on the cards. In addition, each time the strategy is taught there is repetition and both letters are taught together. By teaching the letter together, Michael may have been able to learn the letters more fluently, recognizing them together. Lastly, Michael was not able to identify any sounds on the pre-assessment. After he was instructed with Alphabet Action, he was able to identify /d/, /m/, /n/, /r/, /s/, /w/, /y/. Michael may have been able to demonstrate knowledge of more sounds on the post assessment because Alphabet Action practiced sounds with a hands-on approach. It paired sign language with actions to allow for the students to be more successful with sounds. By teaching and instructing sounds with the Alphabet Action strategy, Michael may have been able to identify more sounds, than not being
exposed to the strategy. Anthony, Denton, Fletcher and Francis (2006) state, “even students with persistent, severe reading difficulties can benefit from intensive reading intervention” (p. 464).

Table 7 demonstrates Anna’s performance from phonics strategy Alphabet Action (Appendix A). The table shows her scores from the pre-assessment and how she made progress after the phonics strategy was delivered. On the pre-assessment she was not able to identify any lowercase letters or sounds. She was able to identify uppercase letters A, E, T. Anna made significant improvements from the pre-assessment to after the phonics strategy on the post-assessment. The “y” on the table stands for yes the student made improvements or the “n” stands for no the student did not make improvements.

Table 7

Anna’s Performance from Alphabet Action

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre Assessment</th>
<th>Post Assessment</th>
<th>Y or N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A, E, T</td>
<td>A, B, D, E, F, G, H, J, I, L, M, N</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Said “y” and “e” for all letters</td>
<td>e, g, j, t, y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Said “y” and “e” for all sounds</td>
<td>/a/ /b/ /d/ /e/ /f/ /h/ /i/ /j/ /l/ /m/ /n/ /o/ /p/ /q/ /r/ /s/ /t/ /x/</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Y= yes made improvement / N=no did not make improvement

Pre-assessment=uppercase and lowercase letters, and sounds / Post assessment= uppercase and lowercase letter and sounds

According to Table 7 taken from pre-assessment and post assessment scores after completing Alphabet Action, Anna was able to make improvements on letters and sounds. On the pre-assessment Anna knew A, E, T, for uppercase letters. However, after Alphabet Action, she was able to identify A, B, D, E, F, G, H, J, I, L, M, N, O, P, Q, R, S, T, Y on her post assessment. Anna was able to make improvements after being instructed with Alphabet Action.
Anna could have identified more uppercase letters after the strategy because the strategy was visual, hands-on, and repetitive. Once Anna was familiar with the phonics strategy, she was able to practice the strategy over and over. By practicing her letters over and over, Anna could have been able to retain the letters. On the pre-assessment Anna was not able to identify any lowercase letters. After using the Alphabet Action strategy, on the post assessment, she was able to identify lowercase letters e, g, j, t, and y. Anna could have not been as successful with lowercase letters after Alphabet Action because both lowercase letters and uppercase letters are displayed visually on the cards. She may have had a difficult time distinguishing the two apart. Since, she had not mastered her uppercase letters yet, she could have had trouble learning more lowercase letters. Lastly, Anna was not able to identify any sounds on the pre-assessment. After she was instructed with Alphabet Action, she was able to identify /a/ /b/ /d/ /e/ /i/ /g/ /h/ /l/ /y/ /l/ /m/ /n/ /o/ /p/ /q/ /r/ /s/ /t/ /v/ /x/. Anna may have been able to demonstrate knowledge of more sounds on the post assessment because Alphabet Action practiced sounds with a hands-on approach. It paired sign language with actions to allow for the students to be more successful with sounds. By teaching and instructing sounds with the Alphabet Action strategy, Anna may have been able to identify more sounds, than not being exposed to the strategy. Blair, Nichols and Rupley (2009) explain, “Successful teachers are teachers whose students consistently outperform their peers, rely on instructional flexibility so they can provide explicit instruction to struggling learners who need the additional modeling and support” (p. 126).

Table 8 demonstrates Sam’s performance from phonics strategy Alphabet Action (Appendix A). The table shows his scores from the pre-assessment and how he made progress after the phonics strategy was delivered. On the pre-assessment he was only able to identify “m” for lowercase letter and sound. He was able to identify uppercase letters F, L, M, N, O, Q. Sam
made significant improvements from the pre-assessment to after the phonics strategy on the post-assessment. The “y” on the table stands for yes the student made improvements or the “n” stands for no the student did not make improvements.

Table 8

*Sam’s Performance from Alphabet Action*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre Assessment</th>
<th>Post Assessment</th>
<th>Y or N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>__________</td>
<td>__________</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F, L, M, N, O, Q</td>
<td>All Letters</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m</td>
<td>All Letters</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m</td>
<td>All Sounds</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Y= yes made improvement / N=no did not make improvement
Pre-assessment= uppercase and lowercase letters, and sounds / Post assessment= uppercase and lowercase letter and sounds

According to Table 8 taken from pre-assessment and post-assessment scores after completing the phonics strategy Alphabet Action, Sam was able to make improvements after the strategy. On the pre-assessment Sam was able only able to identify letters F, L, M, N, O, and Q. However, after Alphabet Action, he was able to master letters on the post assessment. Sam was able to make improvements after being instructed with Alphabet Action. Sam may have been successful with identifying more uppercase letters because the strategy was visual, hands-on, and repetitive. Once Sam was familiar with the phonics strategy, he was able to practice the strategy over and over. By practicing his letters over and over, Sam could have a chance to retain his letters to mastery. On the pre-assessment Sam was only able to identify lowercase letter “m”. After using the Alphabet Action strategy, on the post assessment, he was able to master lowercase letters. Sam could have been successful with lowercase letters after Alphabet Action because both lowercase letters and uppercase letters are displayed visually on the cards. In
addition, each time the strategy is taught there is repetition and both letters are taught together. By teaching the letter together, Sam may have been able to learn the letters more fluently, recognizing them together. Lastly, Sam was only able to identify sound /m/ on the pre-assessment. After he was instructed with Alphabet Action, he was able to master all the sounds. Sam may have been able to master sounds on the post assessment because Alphabet Action practiced sounds with a hands-on approach. It paired sign language with actions to allow for the students to be more successful with sounds. In addition, the sounds and letters were taught together. By teaching and instructing sounds with the Alphabet Action strategy, Sam may have been able to identify more sounds, than not being exposed to the strategy. Meisels and Xue (2004) state phonics instruction is effective for all students no matter what their ability level may be. It has proven to be effective for all students at all different levels.

Table 9 demonstrates Elsa’s performance from phonics strategy Alphabet Action (Appendix A). The table shows her scores from the pre-assessment and how she made progress after the phonics strategy was delivered. On the pre-assessment she was able to identify A, B, C, E, F, G, H, I, K, L, M, N, O, P, Q, R, S, T, U, V, W, X, Y and Z for uppercase letters. She was able to identify c, d, f, h, i, k, l, m, o, r, s, v, w, x, z for lowercase letters. When identifying sounds she said “I don’t know”. Elsa made significant improvements from the pre-assessment to after the phonics strategy on the post-assessment. The “y” on the table stands for yes the student made improvements or the “n” stands for no the student did not make improvements.

Table 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elsa’s Performance from Alphabet Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to Table 9 taken from pre-assessment and post-assessment scores after completing the phonics strategy Alphabet Action, Elsa was able to make improvements after the strategy. On the pre-assessment Elsa was able to identify letters A, B, C, E, F, G, H, I, K, L, M, N, O, P, Q, R, S, T, U, V, W, X, Y and Z. However, after Alphabet Action, she was able to master letters on the post assessment. Elsa was able to make improvements after being instructed with Alphabet Action. Elsa may have been successful with identifying more uppercase letters because the strategy was visual, hands-on, and repetitive. Once Elsa was familiar with the phonics strategy, she was able to practice the strategy over and over. By practicing her letters over and over, Elsa could have a chance to retain her letters to mastery. On the pre-assessment Elsa was only able to identify lowercase letters c, d, f, h, i, k, l, m, o, r, s, v, w, x, z. After using the Alphabet Action strategy, on the post assessment, she was able to master lowercase letters. Elsa could have been successful with lowercase letters after Alphabet Action because both lowercase letters and uppercase letters are displayed visually on the cards. In addition, each time the strategy is taught there is repetition and both letters are taught together. By teaching the letter together, Elsa may have been able to learn the letters more fluently, recognizing them together. Lastly, Elsa was not able to identify any sounds on the pre-assessment saying, “I don’t know.” After she was instructed with Alphabet Action, she was able to master all the sounds. Elsa may have been able to master sounds on the post assessment.
because Alphabet Action practiced sounds with a hands-on approach. It paired sign language with actions to allow for the students to be more successful with sounds. In addition, the sounds and letters were taught together. By teaching and instructing sounds with the Alphabet Action strategy, Elsa may have been able to identify more sounds, than not being exposed to the strategy. McLemore and Wood explain (2001) explain, “Research evidence over the past 70 years indicates overwhelmingly that direct, explicit instruction in phonics is needed and contributes to better development of decoding, word recognition, and comprehension” (p.3).

Table 10 demonstrates Sam’s performance from phonics strategy Alphabet Action (Appendix A). The table shows his scores from the pre-assessment and how he made progress after the phonics strategy was delivered. On the pre-assessment he was able to identify A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, M, N, O, P, Q, R, S, T, U, V, W, X, Y and Z for uppercase letters. He was able to identify a, b, c, d, e, f, h, i, j, k, l, m, n, o, p, r, s, t, u, v, w, x, y, z for lowercase letters. When identifying sounds he identified /a/, /b/, /c/, /d/, /e/, /f/, /h/, /i/, /j/, /k/, /l/, /m/, /n/, /o/, /p/, /r/, /s/, /t/, /u/, /v/, /w/, /x/, /y/, /z/. Joe made improvements from the pre-assessment to after the phonics strategy on the post-assessment. The “y” on the table stands for yes the student made improvements or the “n” stands for no the student did not make improvements.

Table 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre Assessment</th>
<th>Post Assessment</th>
<th>Y or N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a, b, c, d, e, f, h, i, j, k, l, m, n, o, p, r, s, t, u, v, w, x, y, z</td>
<td>All Letters</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/a/, /b/, /c/, /d/, /e/, /f/, /h/, /i/, /j/, /k/, /l/, /m/, /n/, /o/, /p/, /r/, /s/, /t/, /u/, /v/, /w/, /x/, /y/, /z/</td>
<td>All Sounds</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note, Y= yes made improvement / N=no did not make improvement
Pre-assessment=uppercase and lowercase letters, and sounds / Post assessment= uppercase and lowercase letter and sounds

According to Table 10 taken from pre-assessment and post-assessment scores after completing the phonics strategy Alphabet Action, Joe was able to make improvements after the strategy. On the pre-assessment Joe was able to identify letters A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H,I,J,K,L,M,N,O,P, Q, R, S, T, U, V, W, X, Y and Z. However, after Alphabet Action, he was able to master letters on the post assessment. Joe was able to make improvements after being instructed with Alphabet Action. Joe may have been successful with identifying more uppercase letters because the strategy was visual, hands-on, and repetitive. Once Joe was familiar with the phonics strategy, he was able to practice the strategy over and over. By practicing his letters over and over, Joe could have a chance to retain his letters to mastery. On the pre-assessment Joe was able to identify lowercase letters a, b, c, d, e, f, h, i, j, k, l, m, n, o, p, r, s, t, u, v, w, x, y, z. After using the Alphabet Action strategy, on the post assessment, he was able to master lowercase letters. Joe could have been successful with lowercase letters after Alphabet Action because both lowercase letters and uppercase letters are displayed visually on the cards. In addition, each time the strategy is taught there is repetition and both letters are taught together. By teaching the letter together, Joe may have been able to learn the letters more fluently, recognizing them together.

Lastly, Joe was able to identify /a/, /b/, /c/, /d/, /e/, /f/, /h/, /i/, /j/, /k/, /l/, /m/, /n/, /o/, /p/, /r/, /s/, /t/, /u/, /v/, /w/, /x/, /y/ and /z/. After he was instructed with Alphabet Action, he was able to master all the sounds. Joe may have been able to master sounds on the post assessment because Alphabet Action practiced sounds with a hands-on approach. It paired sign language with actions to allow for the students to be more successful with sounds. In addition, the sounds and letters were taught together. By teaching and instructing sounds with the Alphabet Action
strategy, Joe may have been able to identify more sounds, than not being exposed to the strategy. According to Blair, Nichols and Rupley (2009) state, when mastering the reading process there are five instructional tasks that are essential to reading. They are phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. In order to be a successful reader, phonics and phonemic awareness need to be mastered first. Since it takes students with disabilities more time to master these skills, they especially need interventions implemented early and direct instruction.

Sam, Elsa, and Joe were able to master all letter and sounds after completing the strategy. Alphabet Action was an effective strategy for them. In addition, they were able to generalize this strategy to recognize letters and sounds without having to use the cards and the signs for the sounds.

Alphabet Action (Appendix A) was an effective strategy for all of the students in the study. The students were able to make improvements after being instructed with this strategy. Alphabet Action was hands-on, visual, and interactive for the students. The students were willing to participate in the strategy. Most importantly, this strategy met the individual needs of the students.

Moreover, Blending Match (Appendix C) is a computer based strategy. The students first listen to sounds in a word and then blend the word together. Once they have correctly blended the word together, they pick the picture that matches the word. Blending Match can be difficult for some students because it involves multi-tasking and using technology at the same time. The strategy is visual, auditory, and hands-on. Blending Match (Appendix C) works on blending parts and identifying sounds within a word. The following Table 11 demonstrates how the
students performed before using Blending Match (Appendix C), using the strategy, and after Blending Match. The students were observed while completing the strategy on the computer.

Table 11

*Performance from Blending Match*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Blending Parts</th>
<th>Sounds / Blend</th>
<th>Blending Parts</th>
<th>Sounds / Blend</th>
<th>Blending Match</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre-Assessment</td>
<td>Post-Assessment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scores</td>
<td>Scores</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>1/3</td>
<td>0/3</td>
<td>0/3</td>
<td>0/3</td>
<td>8/20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>2/3</td>
<td>3/3</td>
<td>0/3</td>
<td>0/3</td>
<td>8/20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>3/3</td>
<td>2/3</td>
<td>3/3</td>
<td>3/3</td>
<td>6/20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elsa</td>
<td>3/3</td>
<td>3/3</td>
<td>3/3</td>
<td>3/3</td>
<td>18/20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>3/3</td>
<td>3/3</td>
<td>3/3</td>
<td>3/3</td>
<td>20/20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Y= yes made improvement / N=no did not make improvement
Pre-assessment=blending parts and listened to sounds and blend Post assessment= blending parts and listened to sounds and blend Strategy=blending match

After the Blending Match (Appendix C) strategy was used, some of the students did not make improvements on blending and listening to sounds and blending sounds together. The strategy asked students to listen to words first and then click the appropriate picture; blending the word together. The students needed to demonstrate patience throughout the intervention. In addition, the students had to listen to five words in a row, and they were repeated four times for a total of 20 words. Michael did not make improvements after the strategy with blending. Michael did wait for all sounds in the word, but started clicking and not waiting towards the end. Michael could have not responded to the phonics strategy because it was not intensive and was not repetitive for Michael. Since Michael was still working on mastering his letters, he may have
not been ready to start mastering the skills of blending. He lost interest and motivation during the session as well. Anna was also guessing, distracted, not waiting for all the sounds in the word, and lost her attention quickly. She did not show improvements as well and blending match did not benefit her. Since Anna was still working on mastering her letters as well, she may have not been ready to start mastering the skills of blending. The skills of blending may have been too difficult for her throughout the school year. Sam was inattentive, clicking and guessing answers, moving his chair around, distracted, and lost interest quickly. Due to his loss of interest in the strategy, it may have been a factor in why he scored the lowest on the skills. However, he was able to make improvements on the post assessment. Due to that Sam had mastered all of his letters, it could have helped him to also master and learn the skill of blending as well. Elsa and Joe were the only two students who benefitted from the strategy. When completing the strategy Elsa was patient, listened to all sounds first before selecting a picture, and was attentive throughout the whole session. Demonstrating all these skills throughout the strategy may have helped Elsa to improve on the skills of blending. In addition, know all of her letters and sounds may have helped her to build a stronger foundation to learn how to blend as well. Joe listened well, was engaged, and was not clicking any picture or guessing. He was able to master this strategy. The strategy could have been helpful to Joe because it was reinforcing blending and allowing him to repeat the skills. In addition, by Joe knowing his letters and sounds, it might have helped him to learn blending more quickly.

Therefore, the blending match strategy required multi-tasking and the students lost interest quickly. The strategy was not quick, intensive, and skill and drill for those students. The strategy did not meet the individual needs of most students and did not improve identifying syllables for most of the students in the class. Since the students were not to mastery on their
letters and sounds, it may be the reason they were not ready for identifying syllables. They needed more intense instruction on their letters and sounds before focusing on syllables. Meisels and Xue (2004) state,

Instruction is effective when it provides children with systematic activities in phonics that help them to acquire better alphabetic reading skills. Phonics instruction is clearly important in learning to read, because a major task facing beginning readers is to “crack the code” or figure out how the alphabetic system of the English language works. (p. 219)

Lastly, Syllable Match (Appendix B) is a strategy based on pictures. The students have nine different pictures placed in front on them. The teacher pronounces the sounds in the word to the student. The student blends the word together, points to the picture of the word, and identifies how many syllables in the word by clapping. The syllable match strategy can be difficult for some students because it involves multi-tasking and different components other than identifying syllables. The strategy is visual, auditory, and hands-on. Syllable Match (Appendix B) works on blending parts and identifying syllables in words. The focus of the strategy was to assess if the students could identify the syllables in the words. The following Table 12 demonstrates how the students performed before using Syllable Match (Appendix B), using the strategy, and after Syllable Match (Appendix B).

Table 12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Clapped Syllables Pre-Assessment</th>
<th>Clapped Syllables Post-Assessment</th>
<th>How Many Syllables?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>3/3</td>
<td>0/3</td>
<td>2/9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>2/3</td>
<td>2/3</td>
<td>3/9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
After the Syllable Match (Appendix B) strategy was completed, two of the students did not make improvements on identifying syllables in words. Michael and Anna did not show improvements after the strategy was complete. Michael and Anna could have not been ready for the skill of identifying syllables. By listening and having to clap the syllables in the word, the skill could have been too difficult for the two students. In addition, the students were not mastered with their letters and sounds yet, which could have been holding them back from learning syllables in words. Michael was able to identify syllables before the strategy, however after the strategy he regressed with the skill. Due to focusing on mastering letters and sounds, there may be not been enough intense instruction for Michael to learn syllables. Identifying sounds, blending, and identifying syllables were extremely difficult for Michael and Anna. Due to their significant speech delays these skills made it difficult for them to master. Elsa, Joe, and Sam were students who benefitted from the strategy. They made progression in identifying syllables in words. The strategy may have helped them because it was hands-on and visual. The strategy was similar to Alphabet Action and it could be the students benefitted from the same type of learning. In addition, there was not many distractions with the strategy and that may have allowed the students to increase in the skills of identifying syllables. Hudson, Konold, Lane and Pullen (2009) claim, “the importance of early intervention is quite clear. The notion that early, intensive reading instruction could alleviate early reading failures and narrow the
achievement gap warrants further attention” (p. 278). Teachers need to pay attention to students’ awareness of phonics skills. These need to be mastered first. By building a strong foundation, it will allow students to become stronger readers.

Consequently, Alphabet Action (Appendix A), Blending Match (Appendix C), and Syllable Match (Appendix B) are all phonics strategies to help students with disabilities to increase their phonological awareness. When Michael, Anna, Sam, Elsa, and Joe were exposed to these three strategies some of the students’ phonics skills improved and some of them did not. Looking at the individual students’ and their needs, some of them were at mastery level and ready for all three skills. However, other students were still working on basic letters and sounds and needed to master those first before moving onto other skills. Overall, when provided with these intense strategies, each student was able to make gains in one skill area.

**Impact from Classroom Environment**

All of the students made improvements from the phonics strategies in a least one skill area whether it was letters and sounds, blending and/or identifying syllables. The improvements could have not been only from the phonics strategies, but also from the classroom environment and instruction indicated by the teacher aide questionnaires (Appendix E). Two teacher aides in the classroom completed a 10 questionnaire on different questions about phonics within the classroom and what phonics meant to them. The teacher aides were asked, how is phonics instruction important to students with disabilities? One teacher aide responded, “Phonics instruction is very important to Special Ed students because all students should have the opportunity to learn to read. The more the skill is drilled and worked on the sooner the readiness to start reading will begin.” The teacher aide could be explaining the type of instruction that is intense because it may be the best instruction for the students that she has seen. She has been in
Special Education for years and with changes, she could think that skill and drill is the best instruction for students. The other teacher aide said, “Very important to introduce phonics because you never know how much could be absorbed. Also for further learning throughout the year” (Teacher questionnaires, June 2015). In addition, the other teacher aide could be thinking that repetition and introducing phonics early could both be ways to help students learn phonics skills. Lane and Oslick (2014) explain reading assessments in the classroom can help with identifying students early on and especially students who are struggling so teachers can provide different and effective ways to modify instruction. If teachers are able to identify students early who are struggling and have a true learning disability, teachers will be able to get those students the additional help they need.

Moreover, Magnotta and Rose (2012) explain, small group instruction is important to provide specific teaching, practice, and feedback opportunities to students. It allows teachers to give students the individual attention they need, responding to their needs and also allowing the students to build relationships with the teacher to be more willinging to respond to the teacher. When working in a special education classroom like a 6:1:1 classroom there are more than one teacher in the classroom. There is one teacher and typically one aide. However, in the classroom this year, I had two aides. Two aides allowed for more one to one instruction and small group instruction. When asking the aides the question how do you assist students in their phonics skills, one teacher aide responded, “With one on one whenever needed, taking groups, and sitting along side students.” The teacher aide could be already used to helping students one on one and in smaller groups, thus they are seeing it as providing the students more intense instruction. The other teacher aide said, “Daily drills with letters and sounds, Alphabet Action, and anything else in daily lessons I need to help with from teacher; changes daily” (teacher
STRAATEGIES IMPROVING PHONICS

questionaires, June 2015). Also, the other teacher aide could be thinking the same way. They are there for support to allow for more intense instruction. The type of instruction the teacher aides provide allowed for more students to receive intense instruction and to differentiate for all students. Thus meaning, the students were working in smaller groups to get their needs meet individually. If the students were struggling more than others, they could receive intense one-to-one instruction. Students with disabilities who struggle with phonemic awareness need to receive explicit, intense one-to-one instruction.

On the other hand, making lessons and the classroom engaging and interactive for students with disabilities will help to make their learning more enjoyable. Camahalan and Wyraz (2015) explain, using lessons that are interactive and hands on, students become more engaged in the lesson and are more willing to listen to the teacher. The teacher aides were asked the question, what strategies and instructional methods are implemented into the classroom to assist students with disabilities with phonics? The teacher aide responded, “Alphabet Action, (sign language and sounds), alphabet boards, Smart Board access, visual boards, books galore in the classroom, reading readiness books, computer games, and flashcards.” The other teacher aide responded, “Action Alphabet, visual boards, prompts, manipulatives, computer, dry erase, movement activities, songs, and dance” (teacher aide questionnaires, June 2015) The teacher aides have gone through many years of teaching and those years could be benefitting them to know many materials to help students with disabilities and learning their skills. Students do not enjoy listening to their teacher preaching at them all day long. Students would rather be engaged in learning and making what they are learning memorable for them. If students are engaged in their learning, making it memorable, they are most likely going to remember it. The skills they are learning have to have meaning for them in order for it to stick in their brains. Especially for
students with disabilities, they need multiple ways to learn one concept. By making lessons more hands-on and interactive, the students are more prone to remember those skills. It was possible to do with more help and support in the classroom, making the classroom environment more engaging and interactive for the students.

Finally, with the support of the staff, interactive instruction, and implementation of the phonics strategies the students were able to make progress with their phonics skills. Some students still need more intense instruction to make further gains, however with the environment and instruction they are receiving in time they will begin to see growth in their skills. Not all students learn at the same pace. The research study met each student at their individual level and sought to meet their individual needs. Overall these phonics strategies, can be beneficial to students with disabilities.

**Implications and Conclusions**

Phonics is a foundation to learning to read. It is important that students build a strong foundation to become successful readers. Teachers need to be helping students to build a stronger foundation of phonics skills. When students enter school, they will have a variety of experiences with literacy (Goodman, 1984). Students who have not been enriched in literacy experiences prior to school, may find difficulties with reading. However, the teacher needs to differentiate for students and find strategies to help struggling readers. McDermott and Varenne (1995) explain, “A disability may be a better display for the weaknesses of a cultural system than it is an account of real persons” (p. 327). However, we know that children with any disability deserve the same attention as any other child. By building a strong foundation of phonics skills for students, it is going to lead to success in reading later on. Students who are not able to keep
up with the curriculum need to build on phonics skills before jumping into a specific program. There is a relationship between phonemic awareness and reading achievement (Snider, 2001).

Moreover, teachers need to be aware of their students’ needs. By data collecting and progress monitoring, teachers can interpret how their students are doing in the classroom and change their instruction based on the students’ needs. Students with disabilities who are struggling with their letters and sounds, blending, identifying syllables, and so on need to be assessed early on to figure out what type of instruction they need and how to best meet the individual students’ needs. It is always important to perform a pre assessment and a post assessment to know how students make growth throughout the school year. Teachers should work with students and give them time to respond. When there is time, they will see results. Successful teachers observe student achievement by those who outperform their peers and provide explicit instruction to struggling learners who need the additional modeling and support (Blair, Nichols, & Rupley, 2009). In addition, Lane and Oslick (2014) explain reading assessments in the classroom can help with identifying students early on and especially students who are struggling so teachers can provide different and effective ways to modify instruction. If teachers are able to identify students early who are struggling and have a true learning disability, teachers will be able to get those students the additional help they need. Teachers need to provide more intense instruction to students with disabilities, so there is reinforcement. Also, so students are able to retain the skills in a one to one or small group setting. Students should be allowed to work to mastery level before moving onto or introducing a new skill. Students with disabilities work at a slower pace and need more time to teach and learn new skills. Therefore, Magnotta and Rose (2012) explain, it is important for students who are scoring lower on reading
assessments, to increase the amount of time they spend on reading, particularly in the early reading years, to increase their chances of becoming good readers.

The research paper asked the question, “How do students with disabilities in a self-contained classroom use different phonics strategies to find success in their reading?” The research was conducted among five students in a self-contained classroom with multiple disabilities. The data was collected by interviewing teachers and students, delivering three phonics strategies, recorded observations, and field notes. The three phonics strategies conducted were Alphabet Action, Blending Match, and Syllable Match. The research study met each student at their individual level and sought to meet their individual needs. Overall these phonics strategies, can be beneficial to students with disabilities. Each student was able to improve in one skill area whether it was letter and sounds, identifying syllables, or blending. Phonics is a foundation to learning to read. It is important that students build a strong foundation to become successful readers. Teachers need to meet students at their instructional level to help to improve their skills.

Furthermore, phonics is the foundation to learning to read. Students with disabilities need different strategies to find success with their skills. Children come to school with a variety of literacy experiences. As students begin to socialize and participate within their surroundings, they also begin to learn the language. It is important for students to take action and become involved in their learning and this learning is most successful when there is modeling by the teacher. Students with disabilities are not going to learn the same way, however teachers should be differentiating instruction and providing phonics strategies to increase their readiness to read. When setting up a strong foundation for students early on, students will find more success in their reading later on. Different types of strategies are being used to help students with
disabilities. There are many types of interventions that can be used for students with disabilities when teaching phonics skills. However, the most important part of the instruction, is the way the instruction is being delivered to the students. One to one and small group instruction is the best way to help students with disabilities and increasing their phonics skills. Instruction should also be intensive and explicit for students with disabilities who are struggling with phonics. This research study had support of teacher aides, interactive instruction, and implementation of the phonics strategies. The students throughout the study were able to make progress with their phonics skills in at least one skill area. Some students still need more intense instruction to make further gains, however with the environment and instruction they are receiving in time they will begin to see growth in their skills. Not all students learn at the same pace. Students need time to master one skill before moving onto other skills. This research study met each student at their individual level and sought to meet their individual needs. By building a strong phonics foundation, teachers are aware of their students’ needs. Teachers are becoming aware of their students early on and giving them the intense instruction they need to become successful readers.

In conclusion, if this research were to be conducted again, it would be narrowed down. This research would focus on one skill area and target the skill to monitor and assess if the students could master the skill. The current research focused on three different phonics skills and the students did not make improvements in all three areas. The implementation would be intensive and targeted. In addition, provide more certified support in the classroom for the teacher and the students. By providing more support such as a Reading Specialist, this will allow the study to test if students’ skills would increase more. Lastly, this study aimed to look at phonics strategies for students with disabilities. The study was targeted to meet the individual
needs of each student. Each student made improvements in one skill area throughout the research study. Overall, phonics strategies can be beneficial for students with disabilities.

Therefore, by conducting phonics strategies for students with disabilities it led to further questions throughout the research. With students with disabilities needing intense instruction and one to one support, there is a significant amount of time to make this happen when there is not enough teachers in the room to support this type of instruction. What if there were a Special Education Teacher and a Reading Specialist providing support to the students in the classroom at the same time? Throughout the research, it kept coming up that the students needed more intense instruction. I am wondering if there were more support in the classroom that were certified in reading that the students skills would start to increase. In addition, this would also be a support to the Special Education Teacher as well. On the other hand, during the research some of the students demonstrated they were only able to master one skill or improve in one skill. Students with disabilities learn at a slower pace and need more intense instruction to retain and learn skills. What if students focused on one skill (e.g. letter and sounds) and were exposed to many strategies, giving the students many opportunities to master the one skill? These questions that have formulated from the research can become the basis for future action research that could help the students in my classroom.
References


Doi: 10.1207/S1532799Xssr0502 _2


Appendix A - Alphabet Action (example of one card)
Appendix B - Syllable Match

Directions: Pronounce with a gap between syllables, objects from the page, line Word List, following Position: Position (underneath). Students blend the syllables and point to the object (or, according to practice objectives) by saying the names of objects you point to broken into syllables.

- Burger
- Muffin
- House
- Notebook
- Caterpillar
- Beach Umbrella
- Cat
- Elephant
- Apple
## Syllable Picture Match

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Syllable Word List</th>
<th>Correctly Blended Together</th>
<th>Pointed to Picture</th>
<th>Identified How Many Syllables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Book</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Apple</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Cat</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. House</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Hamburger</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Muffin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Umbrella</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Elephant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Caterpillar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C - Blending Match
Appendix D- Student Formal Interviews

Formal Interview

1. What are letters?

2. What are letters used for?

3. What are sounds?

4. What are sounds used for?

5. How did you learn the alphabet?

6. How did we blend this year?

7. How did you learn to blend this year?

8. What are syllables?

9. How did you learn syllables this year?
Appendix E- Teacher Aide Interviews

1. How is phonics instruction important to students with disabilities?

2. What strategies / instructional methods are implemented into the classroom to assist students with disabilities with phonics?

3. How do you assist students with their phonics skills?

4. What does phonics instruction mean to you?

5. What things would you like to see implemented in the classroom for phonics instruction for the students?

6. How are the students’ instructional needs met?

7. How has phonics instruction changed over time the time you have spent in education?

8. Should students with disabilities be taught phonics skills differently than general education students? Why or why not?

9. How is the curriculum supporting students with disabilities and learning phonics skills?

10. If you have any other comments please provide them below.
Appendix F - Pre / Post Assessment

Name ___________________________ Date ____________________
Teacher __________________________ Scored by __________________________

6:1:1/ 12:1:1 Language Arts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part 1 Alphabet Assessment</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K.RF. 1D, K.RF.3A-B Utilize alphabet inventory.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Upper</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A B C D E F G H I J K L M</td>
<td>3 pts.-all 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z</td>
<td>2 pts.- 15-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 pt.- 0-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lower</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a b c d e f g h i j k l m</td>
<td>3 pts.-all 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n o p q r s t u v w x y z</td>
<td>2 pts.- 15-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 pt.- 0-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sounds</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a b c d e f g h i j k l m</td>
<td>3- all sounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n o p q r s t u v w x y z</td>
<td>2- 11-25 sounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1-10 sounds</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Part 2 Read You Read to Me! I’ll Read to You!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>.RL.5A, K.WL.1-3</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identifies front cover</td>
<td>yes/no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifies back cover</td>
<td>yes/no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifies cover page</td>
<td>yes/no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifies spine</td>
<td>yes/no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**K.RF.1A-C**

A. *Open to any page in book.* Can you show me where to begin reading? | yes/no |

**K.RL.1, 2, 3**

A. Who is one character in the story?

B. What is the setting of the story?

C. What happens at the end of the story? | /3 |

**K.RL.9**

A. What is the same about Clifford and David? | /1 |

**K.RL.4**

A. What does the word “creatures” mean? | /1 |

**K.RL 8, K.W.8**

Who are the ocean creatures? | /1 |

**K.W.1-3**

What is your favorite book? | /1 |
**Part 3 Place You Read to Me! I’ll Read to You! and Colorful Leaves on table.**

| K.RL.5B |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| A. Which book is fiction? yes/no |

**K.RL.6, K.W.1-3**

| A. What does an author do? |

| B. What does an illustrator do? |

| C. What was the title of the book? |

**Part 4 Writing Assessment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>K.W.1D, K.SL.5, K.L.2A-B,</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| After assessment of You Read to Me! I’ll Read to You!, conduct whole group writing assessment. |

| Teacher tells students to draw and write about the story. |

| As you walk around students working, ask students to add an additional detail. |

**Attach sample to this booklet**

| Out of 3 pts.- one for picture, one for words, one complete sentence with appropriate grammatical expectations. |

**Part 5 Rhyming words**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>K.RF.2A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| A. I am going to read some words. Tell me if they rhyme. |

| cat, hat yes/no |

| pig, bed yes/no |

<p>| sun, fun yes/no |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>K.RF.2A</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B. Tell me a word that rhymes with the word I say.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at ________________</td>
<td></td>
<td>/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sip ________________</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pin ________________</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>K.RF.2B</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Let's clap the syllables in the words. Tell me how many syllables.</td>
<td></td>
<td>/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>popcorn (2)</td>
<td>yes/no</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>juice (1)</td>
<td>yes/no</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cucumber (3)</td>
<td>yes/no</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>K.RF.2B</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B. Blend these parts together to make a word.</td>
<td></td>
<td>/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ba-na-na</td>
<td>yes/no</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to-ma-to</td>
<td>yes/no</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>do-nut</td>
<td>yes/no</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>K.RF.2C-E</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Listen to the sounds and blend them together to make a word.</td>
<td></td>
<td>/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/f/ /o/ /x/</td>
<td>yes/no</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/t/ /a/ /p/</td>
<td>yes/no</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/p/ /i/ /g/</td>
<td>yes/no</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>K.RF.2C-E</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B. Listen to the words and tell me all the sounds you hear.</td>
<td></td>
<td>/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cat</td>
<td>yes/no</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sun</td>
<td>yes/no</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bed</td>
<td>yes/no</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K.L.2C-D</td>
<td>Tell me what this picture is. Can you make the sounds and write the letters that match the sounds?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image1.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>K.L.5A</th>
<th>Cross out the object that does not belong.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image2.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>K.L.5B</th>
<th>I'm going to say a word. You tell me the word that is opposite.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dark _______ big _______ hot _______</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>K.L.5C-D</th>
<th>These words mean almost the same thing but they are a little bit different. Use your body to act out the words.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>walk</td>
<td>yes/no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>march</td>
<td>yes/no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tiptoe</td>
<td>yes/no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
K.RL.7
Which picture best matches the sentence below?

The cat is on the bed?

Part 6 High Frequency Words

K.RF.3C
Place a list of Kindergarten high frequency words for the student to read.

I, is, said, any, just
can, play, here, after, know
we, are, was, give, open
the, for, she, could, stop
like, you, he, from, think
a, this, has, her, when
see, do, look, live, some
go, and, with, fly
to, what, my
have, little, me
where

4=31 words, 3=30 words, 2=15-29 words, 1=0-14 words
4=46 words, 3=45-40 words, 2=39-30 words, 1=0-20 words
Part 7 Place a decodable reader *We Can Play/My Pet and Me* in front of student.

A. Read this story to me. Point to the words as you read.

Can the student point?  yes/no

Can the student read the words?  yes/no

B. What happened in the story? Tell me what you remember?

Part 8 Photographs

A. Place photograph A (Grocery store) on the table.

A. Who is this? (point to mom and dad)

B. Where is this family?

C. What are they buying?

Congratulations! You’ve made it to the end 😊

TOTAL POINTS  /65