

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN PHONEMIC AWARENESS

Master Capstone Project

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I give permission to City University to store and use this MIT Project for teaching purposes.

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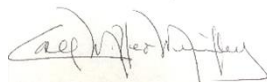


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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN PHONEMIC AWARENESS

Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	2
Acknowledgments.....	3
Abstract.....	4
Introduction.....	5
Dilemma or Problem Statement	5
Rationale	6
Methodology.....	6
Questions.....	6
Literature Review	7
Reflection.....	13
Journal.....	14
Professional Growth Plan.....	16
References	17

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN PHONEMIC AWARENESS

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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN PHONEMIC AWARENESS

Abstract

This professional development study is about my journey of researching the fundamentals of phonemic awareness. When I began my internship, I was fascinated by how phonemic awareness was taught. However, I had little knowledge of phonemic awareness and how it should be taught. I found myself making assumptions about why some students knew how to segment and blend words better than others, which prompted my study. I also became overwhelmed with teaching foundational skills since I had not been taught how to teach it. Nevertheless, I knew that I had to develop a plan of how I would develop the skills to teach it. I would collaborate with my peers in my program, research materials that would be relevant to my learning, watch my mentor teach, and keep a journal of my observations.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN PHONEMIC AWARENESS

Introduction

This professional development study explores my journey as a student teacher in a first-grade classroom, observing students practicing manipulating sounds, segmenting, and blending words. As a pre-service teacher and a career changer, I was curious about how foundational skills like phonemic awareness are taught. When I began my student teaching, I was uncertain in my ability to teach phonemic awareness since I had little knowledge or received training on how to teach it. According to the research that I looked into, it is common for pre-service teachers to lack the skills to teach phonemic awareness. I also struggled with my philosophy in teaching and wondered if observing my mentor teach foundational skills would prepare me to teach it.

Nevertheless, I was determined to educate myself and optimistic that I would grow. I knew that I would learn from observing my mentor teach, and the feedback I would receive from both field supervisor and mentor teacher would be vital for my professional growth. Additionally, I knew that through collaboration with my colleagues, I would receive the support I needed to pursue my goal as an educator.

Dilemma

As a student teacher in a first-grade classroom, I have noticed the various levels of students' phonemic awareness skills and their reading fluency. Students are placed in reading groups based on data received from reading assessment scores. There are twenty-one students in my class, and some of the students have been identified to receive services from a federally funded program called Title I, Part A. As a student teacher, I found myself making assumptions about why some students have a better understanding of how to segment and blend words better than others. Although I have some knowledge about phonemic awareness, I decided that I should learn more

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN PHONEMIC AWARENESS

about how phonemics awareness is taught. I also inquired if I would have the confidence to teach phonemic awareness since I have never been taught how to teach it.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to observe my growth in my student teaching when instructing phonemic awareness. Although I have some knowledge of how phonemic awareness, I am confident that this study will help me better prepare my students' needs and my professional development as a new educator.

Methodology

The methodology of my study consisted of literature reviews, observations from mentor teaching, and journal entries. My study also involved evaluating my teaching and reflecting in my journal. Over time, I knew that I would understand how phonemic awareness and phonics are taught.

Questions

1. Will documenting and observing my professional growth in teaching phonemic awareness deepen my understanding of how to improve my skills and acknowledge my strengths?
2. How might my observation in my teaching better prepare me as a teacher?
3. How will my self-efficacy and my perception as a student teacher impact my teaching?

Assessment 1: Journal entries

Assessment 2: Feedback Observations

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN PHONEMIC AWARENESS

Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to look at how students learn how to read and if pre-service teachers are prepared to teach foundational skills like phonemic awareness to students. Many studies have investigated how students learn how to read and looked at if phonemic awareness is a prerequisite for learning how to read. Other studies have looked at if pre-service teachers have the training and education to teach foundational skills to struggling readers. While students have different levels of reading skills, educators are seeking ways to help support the needs of their students.

Instructing Phonemic Awareness to Students in Early Grades

Early intervention in phonemic awareness has been researched to determine if it can impact a student's ability to read. Students who can segment, blend, and manipulate sounds in a word may do better in reading than those students who lack phonemic awareness. Al-Bataineh and Sims-King (2013) looked into if early intervention in the instruction of phonemic awareness would benefit the students who had minimal or no skills in phonemic awareness. Al-Bataineh's and Sims-King's study involved 18 students who received instruction in a curriculum specifically designed to teach phonemic awareness. The data that was collected was used to measure the effectiveness of the curriculum. Students were tested twice in September and December using the Measures of Academic Progress assessment. The test results were compared and indicated an improvement in the reading scores from December (Al-Bataineh & Sims-King, 2013).

Similarly, research conducted by Yeh and Connell (2008) also supported early intervention in phonemic awareness. Yeh's and Connell's (2008) research focused on three Head Start centers in Boston, which consisted of 128 children. Their study included three groups that were taught phonemic awareness, rhyming, or vocabulary. Yeh's and Connell's (2008) study found students

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN PHONEMIC AWARENESS

who were taught phonemic instruction on segmentation and blending yielded better results than the students who were taught phonemic awareness from reading books that emphasizes on learning vocabulary and from rhyming (Yeh and Connell, 2008).

Phonemic awareness is a skill that may be key to learning how to read, write and spell. Studies have shown that students who have little or no skills in phonemic awareness may also have difficulty in reading, writing, and spelling. Juel's (1988) study investigated possible factors that may have contributed to students' poor reading and writing skills. In their research with 54 students, they found that students who were poor readers typically also become poor writers. She also noted that students who had minimum phonemic awareness also struggled in decoding, which led to poor reading skills. Griffith (1991) noted that a lack of phonemic awareness may have a domino effect on students' ability to spell. Griffith found that students who lacked decoding skills also lacked phonemic awareness, both skills needed for learning how to spell. Griffith (1991) also noted that students who could not recognize the relationship between letter names and sounds had difficulty spelling.

Data indicated that students who exhibited low phonemic awareness did not perform well in the spelling test (Griffith, 1991). However, students who demonstrated strong phonemic awareness tested better in their spelling (Griffith, 1991). Another study done by Juel et al., (1986) also found a correlation between phonemic awareness and students' ability to read and spell. While studies have looked at the importance of students learning phonemic awareness, other studies have looked at if teachers have the skills to teach it.

Teaching Reading Foundation Skills to Struggling Readers

Teaching reading to emergent readers, students who struggle with reading, and students with dyslexia, requires teachers to understand the language structure and how struggling readers

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN PHONEMIC AWARENESS

and students with dyslexia learn how to read. Washburn et al. (2011) looked at the knowledge and skills of student teachers to teach reading to emergent readers, students who struggled with reading, and students who had dyslexia. The study involved 91 student teachers and examined if they understood the components of the language structure (Washburn et al., 2011). The results from the survey indicated that the scoring varied (Washburn et al., 2011). Washburn et al., (2011) found that most teachers had difficulty understanding the concepts of morphology and how different parts of a word can change its meaning. They also found that while most teachers could correctly define phonics, most teachers could not correctly define phonemic awareness. Clark et al., (2017) looked at if pre-service teachers were prepared to teach reading to students. Their study involved 89 pre-service teachers who attended different educational programs and participated in the Literacy Information Knowledge Scale Written survey. They found that the participants scored lowest in the content area of reading comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary. In an earlier study, Moats (1994), noted that pre-service teachers were not prepared to teach reading and writing to emergent and struggling students. Moats (1994) also noted that some teachers had little knowledge in phonics, phoneme, and morpheme awareness.

Pre-Service Teachers Knowledge in Teaching Phonemic Awareness

Teaching students how to read can be difficult for some teachers. Studies have shown that pre-service teachers have little knowledge of how to instruct phonemic awareness. Chessman's et al., (2019) study involved 223 teachers and looked at if those teachers were prepared to teach phonemic awareness. The participants involved in the study consisted of student teachers and in-service teachers (Chessman et al., 2009). Their study found that most teachers had little knowledge of how to instruct phonemic awareness. The research also found that most teachers could not distinguish the difference in the instruction of phonemic awareness and phonics. Chessman et al.,

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN PHONEMIC AWARENESS

(2009) also noted that teachers might benefit from more rigorous training in phonemic awareness and phonics. A similar study that was done by Martinussen et al., (2015) found that when teachers received explicit instruction in phonemic awareness and more instruction time during their student teaching reported higher self-efficacy to teach phonemic awareness.

Research has shown that phonemic awareness is a skill to learn how to read and may impact students' ability to read if they lack phonemic awareness. (Yopp, 1992). Martinussen et al., (2015) found that teachers' understanding of the meaning of phonemic awareness and knowledge of how to instruct it effectively were significant variables. In a study of 54 student teachers, their pre-assessment indicated that they had little knowledge of phonemic awareness. The study also found that teachers who observed more phonemic awareness instruction during their student teaching developed more knowledge in phonemic awareness. The study also revealed that the teachers had more confidence in their delivery of phonemic awareness when they had more exposure to teaching phonemic awareness during their student teaching (Martinussen et al, 2015).

Pre-service Teachers' Phonological Awareness Skills

Some studies have looked into whether providing pre-service teachers explicit instruction in phonological awareness would prepare them to teach to struggling readers. Hurford et al., (2016) looked at if pre-service teachers had the skills to teach the contents of phonological awareness. Their research involved one-hundred sixty-four university students who participated in the Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing (Hurford et al., 2016). Eighty-five of the participants were pre-service teachers and seventy-nine did not have a major in education (Hurford et al., 2016). The results of the study revealed that pre-service teachers were not deficient in phonological awareness and had the skills to teach it (Hurford et al., 2016).

Student Teachers' Self Confidence in the Classroom

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN PHONEMIC AWARENESS

Studies have found that pre-service teachers who have self confidence in their teaching are also able to manage behavior and foster a conducive learning environment for their students. Harun's (2017) research involved 212 student teachers and looked at the correlation between student teachers' emotional intelligence self-esteem, and self-efficacy (Harun, 2017). Harun noted that a teacher's self-efficacy could affect their ability to maintain a conducive classroom learning environment for students. Harun's (2017) study revealed that improving one's well-being led to an increase in self-efficacy (Harun, 2017). Harun's (2017) research also found that student teachers who had more self-efficacy had an increase in their self-esteem.

In another study, Colson et al., (2017) looked at if self-efficacy impacted student teachers' success in teaching. Colson et al., (2017) research consisted of 144 student teachers and evaluated their self-efficacy in student engagement, their teaching strategies, and how they managed the classroom and student behaviors. Their study compared student teachers who spent a year in their practicum vs. those who only had 16 weeks of student teaching and looked at which program had better-prepared student teachers to teach. Colson et al., (2017) found that student teachers who had a year of classroom experience had more self-confidence in their teaching, relationship building with their students, and managing the classroom and behaviors. In Hobson's et al., (2012) study they looked at how mentoring may prepare and provide support for student teachers during their student teaching.

Why Mentoring Matters

Retaining teachers has been discussed and evaluated; however, it is also equally important to ensure student teachers are supported during their practicum. Hobson et al. (2012) found in their research that having a good mentor is a vital process for student teachers during their practicum. Their study involved forty-four participants who took part in a survey called Mentoring Pre-

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN PHONEMIC AWARENESS

Service and Novice Educators (Hobson et al., 2012). The participants were asked to survey what constitutes good mentoring (Hobson et al., 2012). According to the data provided by the survey, the top three categories that benefited pre-service teachers were role modeling, mentoring and coaching (Hobson et al., 2012). In a different study, Grave (2010) examined why it is necessary for student teachers to feel supported.

Rapport Building

Grave (2010) looked at how relationships between the cooperating teacher and student teachers impacted a student teacher's experience during their practicum. Grave's (2010) case study showed that student teachers who had a good relationship with their mentors reported having a good experience in their student teaching. The opposite occurred for those student teachers who did not have a positive relationship with their mentor.

Teachers' Professional Development

Professional development can be valuable for an employee. More importantly, educators have sought professional development as key in their profession. Some studies have looked at how educators used various resources to develop their skills. Alshaikhi's (2020) study looked at how foreign language teachers valued professional development and individualized their plan to fit their learning needs by collaborating with other teachers, using social media, and enrolling in online courses. The internet has provided educators a place to get together and share resources. Ciampa's and Gallagher's (2015) research examined how teachers used blogging to share resources, and research different teaching strategies. Their study also found that educators used blogging as way to share information from their training, reflect and upload resources. Ciampa's and Gallagher's (2015) study also noted that some teachers appreciated the convenience of being able to collaborate with other teachers based on their availability.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN PHONEMIC AWARENESS

In a different study, Kabilan (2016) examined how teachers could use social media to create an online portfolio, connect with other teachers, and share resources. Kabilan's (2016) study consisted of ninety-one student teachers and found that Facebook could be used as a place for teachers to create an online community where they could improve their pedagogy skills by engaging in discussions and sharing resources.

Reflection

In this professional development study, I will share my story about my journey as a student teacher and the struggles that I encountered when learning how to teach foundational skills. I will also discuss and reflect on my growth and feedback that I received from both my mentor and field supervisor.

My journey started in a first-grade classroom at Nelson Elementary in the spring of 2021, wherein I first witnessed how phonemic awareness was taught. Although I had little understanding of phonemic awareness, I was amazed as I watched the 1st graders practice manipulating individual phonemes in a word. I wondered if I would be able to teach phonemic awareness effectively.

When I began the capstone course in the fall of 2021, I was assigned to a different elementary school and decided that I wanted to learn more about how phonemic awareness is taught. I also wanted to learn if there are studies that researched if student teachers are prepared to teach phonemic awareness, including students who struggle in reading.

Journal Reflection

Teaching students how to blend and segment individual sounds within a word was not an easy task at the beginning of my student teaching. I recalled feeling nervous and unsure if I could teach students to segment and blend words. In one of the literature reviews, I learned that it is not

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN PHONEMIC AWARENESS

uncommon for some pre-service teachers to have little knowledge of phonemic awareness and how to instruct it.

During my student teaching, I kept a journal of observations of my mentor teaching and documentation of my teaching. I also discussed my concerns with my mentor and field supervisor about teaching phonemic awareness since I had never been taught how to teach it. Nevertheless, I was determined to learn and grow as an educator.

Although I knew that watching my mentor teach foundational skills would be helpful, I also knew that I would have to supplement my learning through research. One of the teachers lent me a book called *For All Educators Working To Improve Reading Achievement Teaching Reading Sourcebook*. The information that I learned from the book was helpful; it showed me how to teach the sound-by-sound technique when segmenting and blending phonemes in a word. I also reference the book when learning about open and closed syllables and compound words.

I also watched YouTube videos of teachers who taught how to teach foundational skills. Susan (2021) modeled how to segment and blend CVC words and words containing digraphs. In a different YouTube video, Alison (2021) taught how to teach the CVVC syllable pattern and how to decode words that contain blends.

I recall from one of my earlier observations that I improved in my teaching by using various formative assessments to guide my instruction. My field supervisor suggested that I integrate various foundational skills and develop a plan to monitor my students' understanding. As I progressed further into my student teaching, I realized that my teaching techniques improved. I used differentiation in my teaching by providing additional support for the students who needed it.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN PHONEMIC AWARENESS

As a pre-service teacher, there was much information that I had to observe, and having a teacher who took on the role of a mentor eased my stress level so I could concentrate and learn how to be an effective teacher. Through collaboration with my mentor, I incorporated some of the pedagogical skills that I researched. A few scholarly articles that I read mentioned how student teachers must have a good support system while doing their student teaching. I was fortunate to have a mentor teacher that was supportive and collaborative in my student teaching. The next hurdle that I encountered was to work on my self-efficacy.

My Self Confidence as a Teacher

As a career changer, a mother, and a wife, I found it difficult and intimidating during my student teaching since it had been a while since I had been in school. Teaching 1st graders was a skill that did not come easy. I wondered if a teacher's self-efficacy could impact the classroom environment. It took several months before I felt comfortable teaching. I noticed that I had more confidence in my teaching as I became more familiar with the curriculum.

I noticed that the more I taught foundational skills the more confident I appeared in my teaching. I could focus on the lesson rather than second guessing my ability to teach. In one of my later observations, the feedback that I received noted that I had used various instruction strategies that meet the learning needs of a majority of the students.

Recommendations

A recommendation I have for student teachers is that they take charge of their professional development by using different resources to educate themselves. As a pre-service teacher, I thought about how I could educate myself and looked at different resources that I could use to improve my teaching skills when instructing foundational skills. I believe it is the responsibility

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN PHONEMIC AWARENESS

of teachers to be involved in their professional development and utilize the resources that will best fit their learning needs.

Professional Growth Plan

As I move forward as a new educator, my goal that I have established is that I am committed to learning how to teach phonemic awareness. The first step that I would implement in my goal is research which school districts are a part of the BEST mentoring program. I learned from my research that having a mentor is key to a new teacher's growth. Additionally, I plan on attending training that focuses on teaching foundational skills to students within my first year as a new teacher. I also will research reading materials that will be helpful for my learning.

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