

# THE STUDY *of* Early Literacy

## Summary of Teacher Action Research 2015-2016

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### SOEL- The Study of Early Literacy

SOEL is an ongoing, collaborative professional learning network that reflects the latest research on effective early literacy instruction. In SOEL, we are driven by a belief that teacher expertise is a strong predictor of student success, and build teacher's knowledge in both theoretical understanding and instructional skills for early literacy (MAISA GELN ELT, 2016). We put teachers in contact with top literacy experts and texts, and allow them to take charge of their learning through the creative inquiry process of teacher action research.

### The Creative Inquiry Model of Teacher Action Research

Cochran-Smith and Lytle explain that a teacher research stance makes "radically different assumptions about teachers," one that includes seeing teachers as "deliberate intellectuals who constantly theorize practice as part of the practice itself." Teacher research relies on a social constructivist stance, one based on a few core assumptions about classroom inquiry. That this kind of case study approach to research relies on a culture of collaboration: collaboration with students, with other teachers, with administrators, with parents, and with potential readers of our studies. Together we make meaning and create understanding, as we place our classroom findings in conversation with the findings of others in other settings. Teacher researchers are committed to finding the most successful ways to help students learn and so as they critically reflect on their findings, they are constantly rethinking their approaches to teaching and making appropriate change (Brooks-Yip, Fleischer and Norman, 2015).

### Teacher's Research Questions

Teacher's action research questions centered on the SOEL Big Learnings (now included in the Essentials of Early Literacy Instruction): Vocabulary, Classroom Culture, Integration, Inquiry and Collaboration and Assessment.

### Teachers Research methods

- District and other standardized assessments
  - ❖ Rubrics
  - ❖ DIBELs
  - ❖ NWEA
- Interviews
- Pre and post tests
- Observations/anecdotal notes/running records
- Surveys
- Student work samples

### Improvements in Student Literacy Through Changes in Instruction due to Teacher Action Research Findings

#### Cognitive skills

- Increased vocabulary
- Reading with accuracy
- Greater reading comprehension
- Purposeful classroom dialogue
- Greater understanding of text features

#### Social skills

- Engagement with and excitement for literacy learning
- Overcoming fear and inhibition surrounding writing
- Community engagement
- Investment in learning, connecting learning to own lives
- Improved classroom culture



# TeacherAction

## *Research Snapshots*

**Rhoshawda Miller, 1st grade teacher, and  
Caroline Jacob, Kindergarten Teacher at  
Perry ELC in Ypsilanti Community Schools**

*Focus on Vocabulary and Integration*

**Monica Burke and Tammy Woodward, 2nd  
grade teachers at Smith Elementary school in  
Fowlerville**

*Focus on Vocabulary and Integration*

### **Research Background**

Intentional focus on building student's background knowledge and vocabulary may be the single most important factor in their understanding in school. Being aware of the vocabulary gap that exists when children enter school, and knowing that the highest rate of vocabulary development occurs during the

preschool years, we know that educators have time to intervene to help children make gains in vocabulary development that will later lead to improved reading comprehension (Neuman & Wright, 2013).

Literacy instruction is made more authentic, powerful, knowledge-enriching, and personally meaningful through integration with content-area instruction (Cervetti, 2009). Classrooms that are content centered (as opposed to rote activities only) have children learning about print through literacy practice with content specific texts. Through multidisciplinary projects or themes, teachers teach content in meaningful concepts, allowing children to build "knowledge networks" which will likely transfer to new areas of learning (Neuman & Wright, 2013). By integrating literacy into all subjects and exposing children to informational text, not only do they learn to read, they read to learn at a young age.



### **Rhoshawda and Caroline:**

*What happens to vocabulary when students of low SES are exposed to experiential learning such as projects and field trips?*

With intentional instruction aimed at building vocabulary through a thoughtful process of learning through authentic activities and related texts, teachers Rhoshawda and Caroline discovered their kindergarten and first grade students used more vocabulary terms and several more descriptive words in their speaking and writing. Students also made connections across genres, asked critical questions, researched wonderings on their own, and engaged in purposeful dialogue with classmates. The student's writing, in comparison with other years, showed a higher level of vocabulary use, as well as more descriptive words.

### **Monica and Tammy:**

*What happens when teachers introduce science vocabulary in their classroom?*



Using text sets built around science to build background knowledge, Monica and Tammy then guided their students to “talk like scientists” in their hands on science activities, therefore increasing the likelihood that both science content vocabulary and inquiry vocabulary stay permanently in the children’s word usage. During science stations after intentional instruction with the words and through text sets, students could be heard saying, “The small ball was fast, and the big golf ball was slow because it has mass.”

“I’m observing the land on the Earth so I can draw it.”

“I found a tooth fossil!”

Their research did show that students were using inquiry vocabulary in other subjects in their classroom. Monica and Tammy chose to be intentional with the research based and well planned strategies used to teach vocabulary.





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