Critical Review:

Exploring The Efficacy of Explicit Instruction of Morphological Awareness to Improve Literacy Outcomes in School Age Children

Laura Greenwood
M.Cl.Sc (SLP) Candidate
University of Western Ontario: School of Communication Sciences and Disorders

This study presents a critical review of research examining the effectiveness of explicit instruction of morphological awareness in improving literacy outcomes for school age children. The critical review involves an evaluation of six articles exploring various methods of morphological intervention for children from pre-school through grade twelve. Overall, the results of this review suggest that morphological instruction, particularly when integrated with the curriculum, may have benefits for various literacy outcomes among school age children.

Literacy is at the core of every child's academic career, and literacy skills set the foundation for students to be successful from kindergarten through to post-secondary education, and beyond. Understanding what contributes to the development of these literacy skills is, therefore, of great importance. Morphological awareness refers to an awareness of the underlying structure of words, and the ability to parse them into their meaningful units (Deacon & Kirby, 2004). As it contributes to reading, one must be able to use morphological awareness to

meanings of transfer words, a stronger effect was seen in the MO and MC groups than in the CO group. There was no evidence that instruction in morphemic or contextual analysis, either in isolation or in combination, enhanced comprehension of text. In general, students were equally effective in inferring word meanings when morphemic and contextual analysis instruction was provided in combination as when provided separately. Treatment effects for morphemic analysis instruction were, in general, stronger than they were for contextual analysis instruction. Descriptive results provided more detail to support quantitative findings.

This study provides suggestive evidence for incorporating instruction in morphemic analysis in order to learn words presented during instruction and to infer meanings of untaught words. Similar evidence was provided for instruction in contextual analysis only, although less robust when inferring the meanings of transfer words. However,

(isolation vs. integrated with other literacy skills). Relevant studies were identified through a comprehensive and clearly described search. Six inclusion criteria were used, and of the identified studies, 22 met all six criteria and were included in the systematic review. Studies were coded by participant characteristics, and by instruction and study characteristics, however it was not clearly stated how the coding was completed or by whom, and thus no inter-rater agreement was reported. An appropriate effect size measure was employed. Characteristics of the sample populations and the nature of the morphological instruction in the reviewed studies were provided for descriptive purposes.

Results indicated the strongest average instructional effects and the highest average effect size for morphological sublexical outcomes. These results

using the standardized mean difference between comparison and treatment groups, representing the effect of morphological intervention on student literacy outcomes. Variations in effect sizes were accounted for and explained adequately. Dependence between subgroups was eliminated by separating effects by seven types of literacy outcomes.

92 standardized mean differences were collected from the 30 individual studies. Appropriate moderator analyses were conducted to examine between-group should not discount the potential benefits for literacy outcomes that can be seen by providing explicit instruction of morphological skills, and should not hesitate to introduce the concepts of morphology to their students at any age.

American Speech and Hearing Association (2006).

New Roles in Response to Intervention: Creating Success for Schools and Children, 1-52.

Retrieved from: http://www.asha.org/uploadedFiles/slp/schools/prof-consult/rtiroledefinitions.pdf
Baumann, J. F., Edwards, E. C., Boland, E. M., & Olejnik, S. (2003). Vocabulary tricks: Effects of instruction i