

'You have to train us!': Understanding teacher preferences when implementing new research and practices

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Introduction

Senate Enrolled Act 1 in the 123rd General Assembly in Indiana identifies that children in Grade 2 who are not on track for reading proficiently may be at risk of retention in their third-grade classroom. Research indicates that students with reading difficulties struggle with phonological awareness, which is crucial for developing decoding skills (Torgesen, 2000; Kilpatrick, 2015). Effective interventions include explicit, intensive instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency (Keys to Literacy, 2019). Engaging instructional strategies can mitigate the challenges associated with dyslexia, fostering improved reading outcomes and motivation (Bowers & Haggerty, 2018). Readers who don't develop reading comprehension or decoding skills by first grade are more likely to struggle with reading through the entirety of their school career (Keys to Literacy, 2019).

Requiring teachers to discard previous teaching methods for new ones takes time, resources, and belief in the new models of teaching. This research project seeks to understand how pre-service and in-service teachers might positively implement new teaching practices to support reading development and ensure student growth.

Research Question

How do we prepare teachers to use new practice when teaching reading? How do pre-service and in-service teachers implement new practices in their classrooms? How do new teaching practices impact teacher confidence?

Methods

Surveys were sent to pre-service teachers and in-service teachers associated with Indiana University Columbus via email. The survey included responding to Likert-scale and open-ended questions about how they implement new practices and whether they like to work autonomously or in more formalized settings when learning about new practices. All participants were asked if they would like to participate in a 30-minute follow-up interview and/or to receive resources to implement in their classroom. Nine agreed to a follow-up interview and/or resource implementation. Four in-service teachers agreed to participate in a 30-minute interview.

Survey data was analyzed and used as a way to direct interviewees to include specific examples of their preferences for learning new content and pedagogy to implement in their classrooms.

Participants

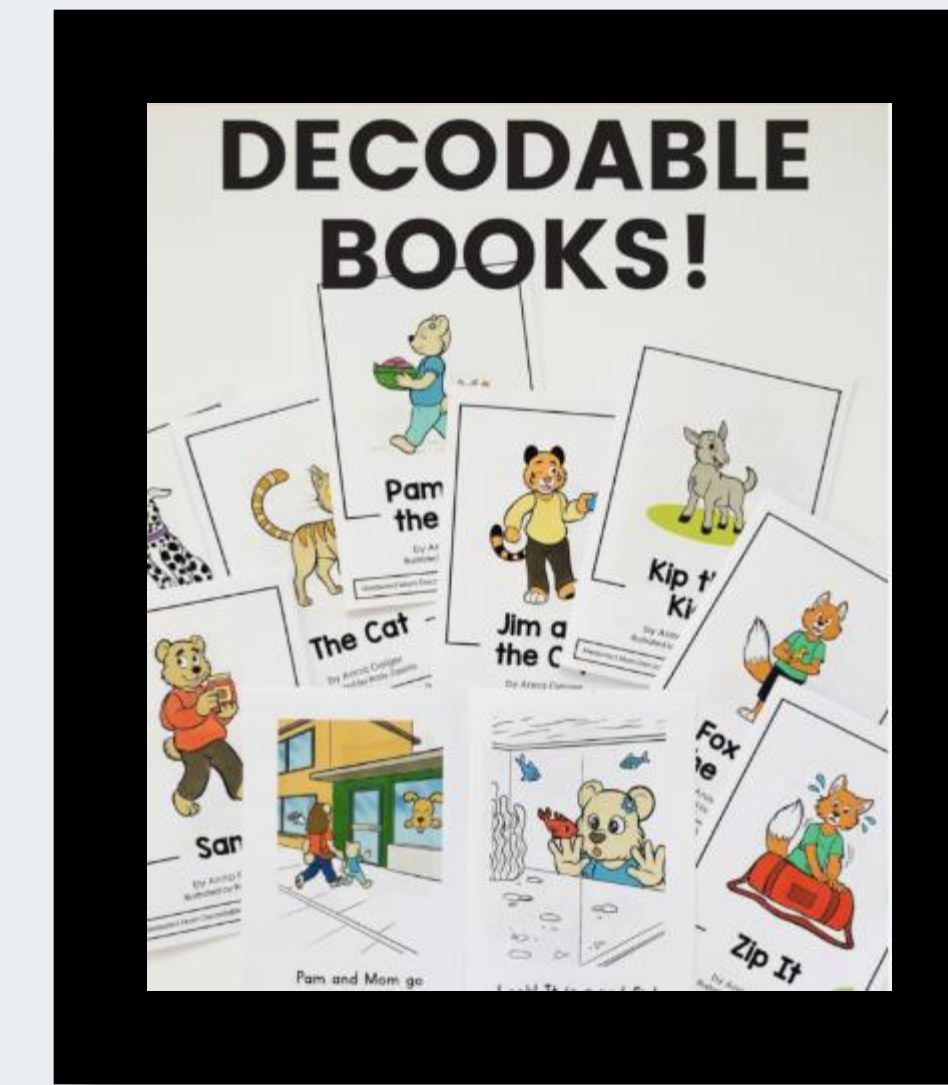
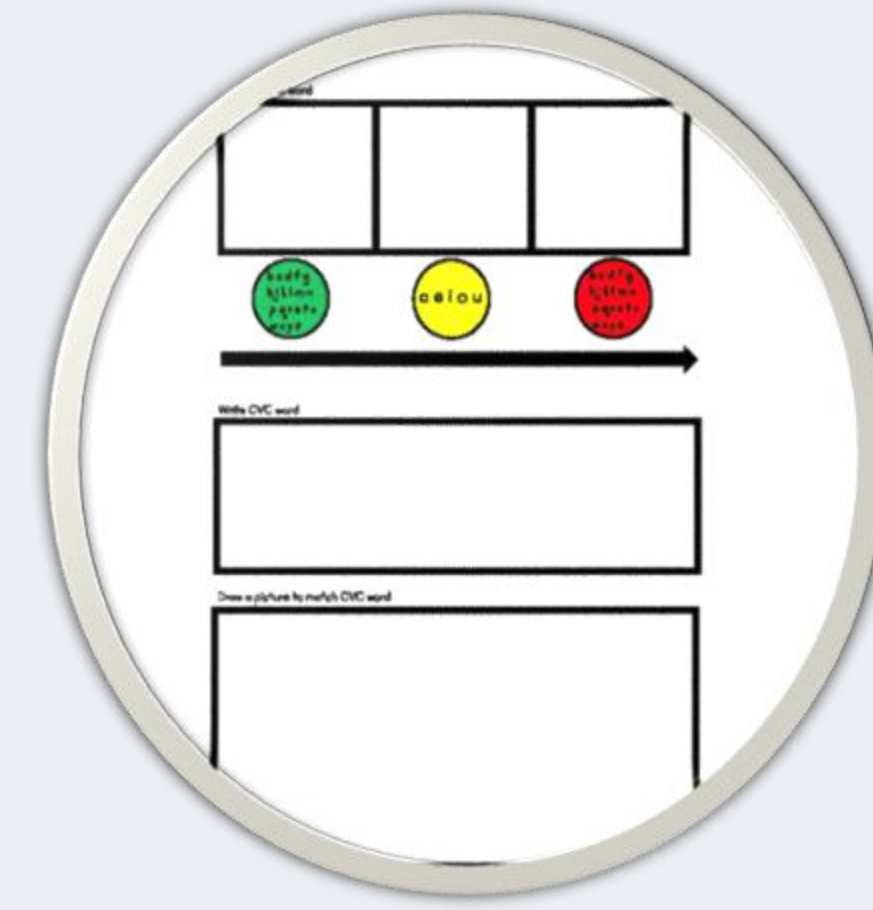
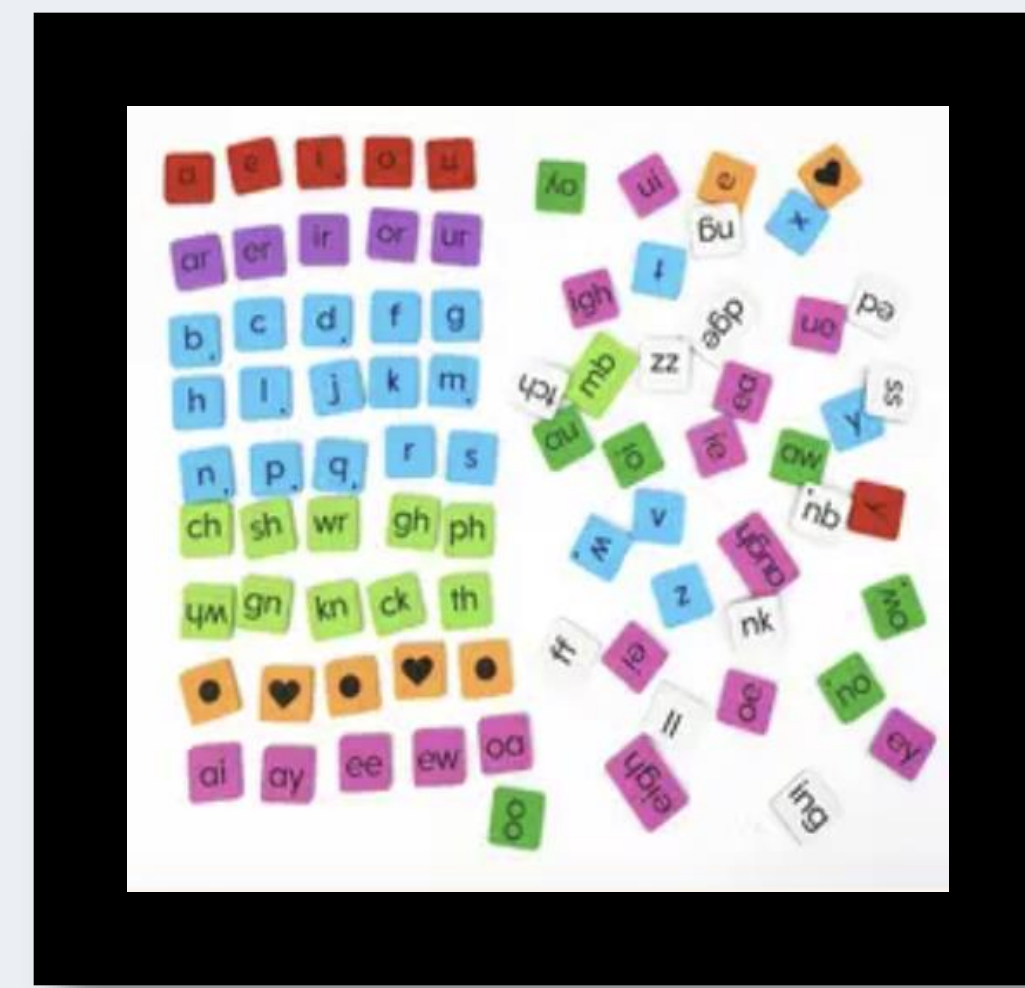
Total Survey Participants: n = 19

Pre-service Teacher: n = 5

In-service Teacher: n = 14

Received resources to implement in classroom: n= 2

Participated in follow-up interview: n= 4



Findings

How do you like to learn about implementing new practices?				
Teacher Type	Online Program or Video	In-Service Professional Development	Another Teacher Shows/Tells Me	Reading about it on my own
Pre-Service	1	3	1	N/A
In-Service	2	8	3	1
How confident do you feel when you are NOT provided with instructional materials?				
	Extremely Confident	Confident	Somewhat Confident	Not at all Confident
Pre-Service			3	2
In-Service	2	4	7	1
Do you prefer to create your own materials or have standardized materials provide to you?				
	Create my own	Provide standardized materials	It depends	Reasons for "it depends"
Pre-Service		3	2	(1) Need to differentiate (1) Time
In-Service		6	8	(3) Need to differentiate (3) Content-specific preferences (2) If standardized materials don't match the skill

Train Us

Teachers showed interest in learning new practices and a focus on student-learning outcomes. A surprising finding was their overall interest in professional development as an in-service activity as the overall preference (58%) for learning new instructional practices. Follow-up interviews confirmed this finding with specific examples demonstrating quality instruction previously received and instruction desired but not yet received that included in-person, small group, practical applications of practices.

Time

Teachers identified that they need more time to practice new skills, learn new content, and reflect on their experiences and the experiences of their peers.

Differentiation

Teachers expressed the difficulty when applying standardized curriculums that provided little to no instruction on how to differentiate the content to meet the unique needs of learners in their classrooms.

Limitations

- Small sample size
- Time
- Access to teachers during school hours
- Limited approved training materials

Conclusions

Teachers are eager to learn new practices and implement them in their classes. However, they want interactive learning and application in real time. They want to watch an expert implement the practice, then practice it, then receive interventions after taking time to learn it with a sample group before implementing with their classroom. They also want more time and guidance on differentiating for diverse learning profiles.

Next Steps

- Continue interviews
- Provide in-person professional development for Science-based reading practices

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