

Janelle Mayes-Henry
December 13, 2015
TE 842 - FS15

Book Review – Words Their Way

I enjoyed reading *Words Their Way: Word Study For Phonics, Vocabulary, And Spelling Instruction* (2016) as part of the book club group that I was in. As a Kindergarten teacher, it is my job to teach the beginning level of phonics and phonemic awareness to my students in order for them to move on to decoding and reading with understanding. This book offers a whole chapter on how to instruct emergent readers to move through each stage of the literacy components that are essential in learning how to read and write. Therefore, I thought this book would be a great resource for my professional career in regards to moving my students through the beginning stages of reading in order to get them ready for the following stages to come.

It was necessary to remind myself the importance of word study before I delved into the book further. The importance of word study is to “teach students how to look at and analyze words so that they can construct an ever-deepening understanding of how spelling works to represent sound and meaning” (Bear et al, 2016, p. 5). Students have to first, be able to sound out the letters within the words, then learn how to blend those sounds together to make words, and finally be able to spell the word in order to then focus on meaning. If students focus too much on the decoding of the word, then the comprehension will get the least attention. As teachers, we want our students to become fluent in reading so that words can be understood in the correct context when answering implicit and explicit questions.

One thing I really like about *Words Their Way* is that it explains how the stages of reading occurs throughout multiple age groups and grade levels. There may be some children in

lower grades that can reach a higher stage than others in their class and then there may be older children who may be at a lower stage than their peers. This book gives clear examples of what each stage looks like and then give examples and tips on how to use word sorts and other resources in order to help students reach the target for that stage. When reading about the emergent reading phase, it goes through the phases of how students first learn to memory read in order to *look* as though they are reading every single word on the page. “Reading from memory helps children coordinate spoken language with print at the level of words, sounds, and letters” (Bear et al, 2016, p. 94). After that comes the emergent writing phase shown in Figure 4.4, where students first have random marks on the page and moves all the way to the last phase which is partial phonetic where students write the sounds they hear as they spell the words (Bear et al, 2016, p. 95). I love, love, love how Chapter Four talks about how to support emergent writing through centers. My school just adopted the Success For All (SFA) Reading Program this year where it focuses on providing a print rich environment for the students within the classroom. This chapter now gives me even more examples of how I can incorporate more print into their centers (or labs as SFA likes to call them). Chapter Four also gives examples on how to support emergent reading by *reading to students* but also *reading with students* (Bear et al, 2016, p. 99). You want to be able to allow students to start getting that autonomy and confidence to read on their own as they are slowly getting better and better at sounding words out and recognizing sight words in print. Some activities the chapter suggests are having students to create concept sorts (where students are assessed and monitored on their vocabulary growth by sorting vocabulary words) and also sound picture sorts (where students sort beginning letter sounds) (Bear et al, 2016, p. 103, 110). The last two suggestions

that I like from the chapter is the Emergent Literacy Plan in Figure 4.4 (p. 119) and the listed resources for Implementing Word Study in the Classroom (p. 120-144).

There are soooo many good resources that this book has to offer that it's too many to name. I just wanted to focus on what was relevant to my grade level that I teach at this time. When talking to my group about the book, we agreed on a few things. We agreed that word study is developmental, it occurs in stages where it scaffolds learning to read and write in sequential stages. We also noticed that if a teacher needs help recognizing what stage a student is at, teachers can use Figure 1.5 (p. 11) to gage the student's level and know where the student is at and know what needs to be worked on (Bear et al, 2016). Everyone in my group agreed that the best way for students to learn to read and write is the "I do, we do, you do" or the gradual release method. Students learn reading strategies by seeing them first modeled and used by the teacher and then by using the strategies themselves.

I am excited to try the resources listed for Implementing Word Study in the Classroom for the Emergent Literacy Stage (p. 120-144) with my students as they learn to read and write throughout the school year in hopes of moving on to the next stages more efficiently (Bear et al, 2016). I would recommend this book to mostly lower elementary teachers which are the ones that focus on *learning* to read and write the most. I believe all teachers can benefit from this book in some form or fashion because we have a wide range of reading abilities in the classroom these days that requires teachers to be able to differentiate instruction in order to service all students. In conclusion, Words Their Way was helpful to me as a Kindergarten teacher to recognize why the emergent reading stage was so important in setting the

foundation for later stages, as well as gave insightful strategies, tips, and activities to guide my students in learning to read and write.

Works Cited

Bear, D., et al. (2016). *Words their way: Word study for phonics, vocabulary, and spelling instruction* (Sixth ed.). Pearson.