

The purpose of our study was to investigate how a group of students entering third grade could learn to understand and solve word problems. We designed an instructional sequence to help students overcome difficulties they had with word problems so that successful strategies and solutions could be acquired. The research questions guiding our study were: (i) Where in the process of solving word problems do students struggle?; (ii) What instructional and organizational strategies can help students with word problems? The four study participants had completed second grade and were entering third. Each student participated in a 30-minute individual pre- and post-interview. Seven weekly instructional sessions took place between these assessments. Each interaction with the children was video recorded and transcribed, and we retained students' written work for analysis. Each week over the course of the study, we collaboratively coded qualitative classroom data from each lesson. Our data analyses helped us design lessons tailored to the needs of the students. In the initial interviews, all students struggled to solve word problems and demonstrated task-avoidant behavior. Therefore, we designed lessons to promote student engagement and motivation. All students demonstrated growth in at least some of the skills needed to solve word problems. We found that that when solving word problems, there are two critical areas of focus: reading/language arts and mathematics. We believe it is crucial to design and implement lessons that address both areas simultaneously, and we offer a classroom-tested tool from our study that teachers can use to do so.

Poster available online: <https://www.salisbury.edu/administration/parents-family/images/SU-19-Burgess-group-poster.pdf>