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Using Different Strategies to Aid in the Acquisition of Sight Words for Students with Specific Learning Disabilities

An Action Research Report

By Amy Ersland

Using Different Strategies to Aid in the Acquisition of Sight Words for Students
with Specific Learning Disabilities

By Amy Ersland

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in fulfillment of final requirements for the MAED degree

St. Catherine University

St. Paul, Minnesota

Advisor _____

Date _____

Abstract

The objective of my research was to establish a differentiated learning plan to support students who struggle with the acquisition of common sight words, thus experience difficulty reading. The research was conducted in my second grade classroom with two students who had been identified with specific learning disabilities. Both students were reading at a kindergarten level and experienced great difficulty with memorization of words. My research-based interventions included gradual introduction and daily repetition of common sight words, frequent rereading of leveled text, and various multisensory activities to aid with rote memorization of sight words. My data revealed a significant increase in the acquisition of sight words. In addition, the reading fluency rate of my students doubled, while confidence flourished.

Memorizing common sight words is a vital part of learning to read. Many children catch on quickly to new words and gain mastery of many more words through frequent reading. In contrast, students with specific learning disabilities have low working memory and weaker attention spans, thus struggle with the memorization of words, which greatly affects reading. This paper will discuss the importance of memorizing and reviewing common sight words, the effectiveness of repetition, and the significance of multisensory activities to aid with memorization of common sight words. It will answer the question: How will second graders who struggle with the acquisition of sight words respond to a differentiated and multisensory approach to learning new words?

For this study, I used my second grade classroom with 19 students, ages seven and eight, in a school with 437 students in grades K-5. Out of 19 students, four students had Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and received special education services. Three students received services in gifted education for advanced capabilities. Of these three students, one student read at a seventh grade level and required differentiated reading curriculum. A total of five students qualified for Title 1 reading services. One student was on a plan for severe behavior modification. This particular class was considered a high needs classroom due to the considerable range of abilities and needs among the students.

Two students were chosen for this study based on that their academic needs were considerably lower than the average second grader. Both students functioned at a kindergarten

level in most academic subjects. Kaden* was a compliant eight year old student with strong parental support. He was diagnosed with specific learning disabilities and weak attention span. He was well-below average in cognitive functioning, demonstrated low working memory, weak verbal reasoning and expressive language. He received intensive speech language and special education services daily due to articulation and comprehension weaknesses.

James* was an energetic eight year old student with less compliance to authority than Kaden. He experienced many transitions from school to school and had less academic support at home than Kaden. He was diagnosed with specific learning disabilities and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). He had below average cognitive functioning and low working memory. Services were provided through special education and Title 1 reading services. A teacher's aide worked with both students daily, in a less distracting environment, for 30-75 minutes on a modified curriculum in math and reading.

There are several causes of underachievement in reading according to the National Reading Panel study (1999). The four most common causes include few reading role models and limited life experiences, difficulty with the acquisition of reading skills, poor visual processing, and learning disabilities. Students with specific learning disabilities have difficulty receiving, understanding, remembering, and communicating information according to Sheryl Handler, M.D. (2011). She notes different causes of underachievement: deficits in spoken

*used of a different name for the purpose of this study

language skills, inadequate instruction, or a true reading disability, such as dyslexia. Dyslexia refers to difficulties in decoding, word recognition, reading fluency, spelling and writing.

According to the Learning First Alliance (1998), struggling readers face negative consequences such as grade retention, specific assignment to special education classrooms, or participation in long-term remedial reading programs. As these readers progress through the grades, the academic distance between proficient readers grows more pronounced, and the struggling readers rarely catch up. According to Handler (2011), it is important to start reading interventions before third grade to have the best chance for success. Children with reading delays may need up to 60 minutes of intensive, small group reading interventions each day, in addition to their regular 90 minutes of reading instruction.

A common theme throughout the research on reading is that the memorization of instant sight words is crucial in helping children become successful, independent readers. Fry (1999), Dolch (1948), and O'Connor (2007), all feel that the first and most important step in teaching a child to read is memorization of sight words. O'Connor (2007) considers the inability to recognize printed words as the largest barrier in the reading process for students with disabilities.

One of Fry's (1999) many contributions to our current understanding of early childhood literacy development identifies the most-used words in the English language. These words are called instant or sight words and are found often in text. He has determined that the at least one of the first ten words appear in every sentence. The first 100 words on Fry's list

consists of 50% of all printed text and the first 300 words consists of 65%. When students expend energy on reading these basic words, comprehension is often weakened.

According to Fry (1999), mastery of the first 300 instant words can take up to three years to achieve for young children. An average student will learn about 100 words a year; this number is decreased if students have disabilities or limitations. In comparison, Edward Dolch, (1948) identified 220 common words and 95 nouns that children encounter most in print. It is interesting to note that many of the words on Fry's list are also on Dolch's list, suggesting that both researchers were looking for common words in reading and writing that all children need to memorize to be successful in school. Dolch (1948) believed that a child's language development, next to character development, is the most important part of the learning experience.

Interestingly, authors in the field of education define "sight words" in different ways. Ehri (2005) believes that any word read successfully from memory is a sight word. Concurring with Ehri, O'Connor (2007) notes that sight words are the core of words that children instantly recognize when seen in print. She believes that there are two kinds of sight words: words that can be decoded by sounding out the letters (for example get g-e-t) and words that cannot be sounded out because spellings are inconsistent with patterns (for example of).

How do teachers help children with specific reading disabilities memorize words that have irregular spellings that cannot be decoded using phonological reading methods? O'Connor (2007) believes in a method for irregular words called orthographic reading in which the child

notices that strings of letters make a word. Teachers assist children by examining all the letters to see how each letter contributes to the word. In comparison, Ehri (2005) recognizes that skilled readers read words as single, whole units while struggling readers look at the first letter or individual sounds, rather than the whole word, and often take an incorrect guess.

Ehri (2005) determined that there is a connection-forming process that links spellings to pronunciations and meanings. Connections are formed from phonemic awareness and knowledge of spelling patterns. Readers look at the spelling of the sight word, pronounce it, and look at specific phonemes (for example, ph /f/) when rereading the word the next time. Knowledge of phonemic awareness or phonics patterns must be memorized through clear teacher instruction. Phonics, which is the relationship between letters and sounds, is taught along with sight words. According to Ehri (2005), typical readers require four repetitions to learn a new word, in contrast with Marzano's theory that it takes up to six repetitions to become familiar with the word (Marzano, 2011). Students with specific reading disabilities may need many more repetitions than other children to memorize words.

Children, who do not read well, tend to read less often, thus negatively impacting their reading skills and comprehension (Handler, 2011). Huang, Nelson and Nelson (2008) and Fry (1999) claim that another way to increase memorization of words is for children to read text that can be read with 99% accuracy consistently and repetitively. Marzano (2011) believes the nature of the text influences how children learn words. Low density text (1 new word per 150 words) provides a 30% chance of learning a new word. Text with too many new words (1 new word per 10 words) provides a 7% chance of learning due to comprehension issues and slow fluency.

Huang's et al., (2008) research asserts that repeated readings can increase fluency and memorization of sight words when implemented daily. This strategy begins with a teacher or trained tutor reading the text to the child with expression and proper pacing, then the child reads it out loud with support. The teacher asks several questions about the text to gauge understanding. Finally, the child reads it again independently. In a report by the National Reading Panel (2000), fluency is suggested to be the least understood and most neglected area of reading. Students who read less often lack adequate exposure to common sight words. Falk, Band, and McLaughlin (2003) agree that average readers tend to learn sight words from repeated readings. Students with reading disabilities need frequent, short lessons in order to read fluently and memorize sight words. Interestingly, a study from the National Reading Panel (2000) discovered that no research support could be found for using silent reading as an intervention to improve fluency for struggling readers since these readers are often off-task or tend to make too many errors while reading independently. It was interesting to note that all the researchers referenced believed that students with disabilities need to be monitored often while reading aloud to a skilled listener, rather than expected to read silently and independently.

Fry believes there are several steps in teaching a child to read. First, students are presented with a story that includes only simple vocabulary words (for example the, and, of) and short sentences with pictures. The students are given help reading these stories aloud and silently. As the child progresses, more words are added, and the sentences get longer. Comprehension questions are asked to gain an understanding of what words mean and what is read, followed by the ability to write stories about what is known (Fry, 1999).

According to Fry, “You teach a student to read by helping him to learn the relationships between printed words and their meanings” (1999, p.7). Along with the importance of memorizing sight words, it is essential for children to understand what the words mean. As the director of ASCD Learn (2005), Marzano recommends a Six-Step Vocabulary Strategy to help children understand and use words in their speech and writing. Students with specific learning disabilities in reading may have a difficult time understanding the meaning of basic sight words (such as their, form, about). The Six-Step Vocabulary Strategy involves thinking about the meaning, hearing a definition, illustrating and writing a definition in the child’s words, and sharing ideas with other children (D’Arcangelo, 2005). Marzano (2011) states, “One of the best ways to learn a new word is to associate an image with it” (p. 126). Marzano emphasizes the importance of choosing only five to seven words that are important to instruction and content, rather than focusing on too many words during one week.

Most teachers understand the importance of having children memorize sight words. One of the concerns of teachers is how to keep students with specific reading disabilities engaged in learning sight words. Feldman and Karapetkova (2009) and Falk et al., (2003), advocate the use of effective multisensory strategies which can be helpful when teaching instant sight words. According to their research, many of the engaging activities listed below work well with preschoolers and children with reading disabilities, who seem to learn best when using sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell to interact with words. Below are examples of effective multisensory activities for learning sight words found in the book, *I Love Letters* (Feldman and Karapetkova, 2009).

- Air writing words with the index and middle finger together
- Tummy writing words while lying on their stomach and tracing words on the carpet with their finger
- Palm writing involves writing words in the palm of your hand
- Rainbow writing involves writing words over and over in different colored markers
- Making words with materials like clay or play dough

While Feldman's strategies involve sensory activities and movement, Falk's et al., (2003) strategies, listed below, include games and repetition to build memorization. The following activities are taken from Falk's et al. (2003) article about the effectiveness of using racetracks and other strategies to learn instant words.

- See it, Say it, Spell it Strategy: This strategy could be timed as children pull a word card out, say it, spell it, write it down, and continue until the time is up. Timing may be helpful with some children who need incentives to stay on-task and not as effective with other students who feel anxious.
- Games such as memory can be used to keep children on-task to learn words. The word cards are doubled and turned over. The child turns over two cards to see if there is a match by saying the words aloud.

- Bingo is a great game to play to help memorize common sight words. For children struggling to learn words, start with only nine words on the board, working up to 25 words eventually.
- Racetracks can be made out of cardboard or game boards. Students choose a matchbox car to drive along the racetrack while reading the words aloud. The children race from start to finish by saying the words quickly. This encourages children to engage in learning words with a focus on saying the words quickly, within one to three seconds. Words can be slowly replaced with new words as memorization improves.

The overall consensus among Fry, Dolch, Ehli, and Handler is that it is essential for students to memorize sight words quickly, so the focus of reading can be on understanding the text. Researchers and authors have different views on how to achieve the goal of memorizing instant sight words and not every strategy will work with every child. It is up to the teacher to discover what strategies are most effective for individual students with specific reading disabilities in order to provide a successful educational experience.

Description of Research Process

Over the course of the six week study, my differentiated focus was to limit the number of sight words introduced weekly, constant review of previously studied words, use of multisensory activities and repeated readings of beginning level text. I worked with Kaden and James daily on memorization of sight words and reading fluency. Collaboration with specialists and a teacher's aide included adjustments to the differentiated learning plan which was vital to the research process. I analyzed the multisensory activities against each other to determine which activities produced the most engagement and retention of words.

I started with the first 100 words from Fry's list of the most popular words used in print (Fry 1999) (See Appendix A). Each week new words were included on a modified spelling list and most of the writing, reading and multisensory activities revolved around these words. Much time was spent on reviewing words from previous weeks to keep memorization active and ongoing throughout learning. On Thursdays, eight modified spelling words (for example them, the, so, you, bug, tug, rug, hug) were sent home and a list of the same eight words was placed in a bag for specialists and the teacher's aide to utilize during lessons to increase collaboration. The first four words were taken from the Fry's most common word list and the last four words were created from a short vowel family (for example /ug/ /it/ /op/ words). Each week four sight words were added to the list of memorized words. The students practiced a list of previously studied words, along with the new weekly words. This memorized list continued to grow each week with the addition of new words. The focus was on speed with recalling the sight words within one to three seconds and retaining memory from week to week.

There were different methods used to introduce words. Decodable common sight words (for example has, on) were sounded out. However, many sight words cannot be easily decoded (for example: could, word) since the spellings are irregular. Sight words often carry no meaning and cannot be visualized so memorization can be more difficult. Chanting or clapping the letters to spell the word was one technique utilized during learning. Difficult words (such as would, was) were formed with clay, sticks or other materials to help increase memorization. A particular paper fold strategy was used to learn words. I wrote the word at the top of a regular sized sheet of paper. The students viewed the word, said it and spelled it aloud. Then, the paper was folded to cover the word and the students wrote the word from memory. Next, the paper was unfolded to see if the words matched. If the spellings differed, a discussion was held about the differences among the words. This procedure was repeated three times before moving on to new words. This strategy helped with memorization of the word and the correct spelling.

Weekly, the students were assessed to determine the number of sight words recalled quickly and accurately within three seconds. The results of this data were used to plan the weekly lists and determine if memorization was taking place. Every few weeks, it was necessary to create a review spelling list to strengthen memorization skills. On Thursdays, the spelling test was given to both students in a small setting with extra time to complete the eight words. Results were recorded, and the test was sent home to parents that day, along with the new spelling list for the following week.

Multisensory, kinesthetic and tactile activities were utilized to help with memorization of words. Activities included BINGO, Racetrack, Boggle, Scrabble, and Word Building with Tiles. BINGO and Boggle were both very motivating games that helped with review of many sight words. Scrabble was used for building words with different letters and placing letters in the right order to make words. Word Building with Tiles involved a selected number of letter tiles used to create common phonetic words and sight words. I would help the students pull out 6-8 letter tiles, including consonants and one or two vowels. I would say a word (for example rug) and the students would find the correct letters and move the tiles to make the word. The words were also written on white boards with different colored dry erase markers. Writing on boards helped prepare students for the spelling test and with fine motor skills. Racetrack was played with a racetrack game board filled with sight words and small toy Matchbox cars. The goal was to read the words written on the track as quickly as possible as the car is raced around the track from start to finish. Occasionally, some words were taken off and replaced with new words.

I used an engagement chart and a timer to record the number of minutes the students were on task with each multisensory activity (See Appendix B). Thus, observation was necessary to note the activities that were most effective for learning. After the activity was set up, I discretely started the timer and marked down student behavior and time on and off task. If a student started a discussion of a topic off task, this time was recorded on the chart. If the students stayed on task and stated the words in a productive way that time was recorded. I would record the types of distractions that led the students to become off task to help with planning activities. At the beginning and end of my research, I conducted a one-on-one survey (See Appendix C) with both

participants to discover the students' interests and which activities provided motivation for learning.

To assist with memorization of high frequency sight words, students read aloud repetitive kindergarten books (See Appendix D). Much guidance was given to stay on track while reading using fingers to guide the way. Repeated reading of the same text was a significant part of daily instruction. The students read several books daily that included many of the new and previously studied sight words. These leveled books were taken from the resource bookroom, located in my school, which housed leveled books from preschool through eighth grade. During this study, these students were reading kindergarten books from level B to C, whereas most second graders progress from level J to level M by the end of the year. Level B and C books have one or two short, repetitive sentences on each page with bright, colorful pictures.

Along with the Title 1 reading teacher, I collected data on the fluency of the student's reading, along with the accuracy of the number of words read correctly. I used the AIMSweb fluency computer assessment to check weekly reading speed and accuracy. AIMSweb is a progress monitoring and data collection system that provides support for interventions and tiered instruction using valid measures of performance (AIMSweb Pearson). The students read one passage at a first grade level for one minute (See Appendix F). There were no kindergarten passages to access and these students had mastered letter and sound memorization, so the first grade passages were used instead of kindergarten. The number of words correct, plus an accuracy percentage, was recorded on the computer graph and a student graph. The students

shaded a bar graph to represent the number of words read correctly in one minute and set a new goal for the following week.

Attention was specifically focused on the first letter of unknown words since both students made quick, inaccurate guesses that did not flow well with the context of the sentence. This simple strategy helped improve the accuracy during fluency tests and daily reading, along with the memorization of more common sight words. Simple and few strategies, rather than multiple strategies, worked best for these students due to shorter attention spans and weaker memory.

Along with reading fluency, simple sentences, containing about five to seven words were written each week using many of the common sight words. At the beginning of the year, the teacher modeled writing while students copied the sentences written by the teacher. As the study progressed, both students were able to generate simple sentence ideas and write with minimal assistance from the teacher (See Appendix E). Capitalization and punctuation were not automatic at any point during the school year so much encouragement and direction were given to these students in this area.

According to the educational plan that I set up at the start of the school year, all teachers, specialists, and aides who worked with Kaden and James, focused on the review and practice of the same set of sight words weekly. A small green bag was hung on a hook by the classroom door which contained a list of weekly sight words, the current spelling list, and leveled reading books. When these students attended special services, all teachers and aides taught similar content at a consistent readiness pace. There was continuous communication among specialists, teachers, parents and aides with curriculum adaptations and performance concerns. Meetings

were held with the students' families and all specialists involved a minimum of three times during the school year.

In regards to special services, Kaden and James left the regular classroom setting an average of 60 minutes a day for differentiation of reading curriculum. Kaden attended speech services daily for 20 minutes and occupational therapy services 40 minutes weekly. James participated in 30 minutes of Title1 reading services daily and one 20 minute service of occupational therapy weekly. Otherwise, the students were part of the regular classroom instruction during the morning reading lesson for approximately two hours. The students were fully engaged in all science, social studies, and art activities, as well as special presentations and programs. James, especially, thrived in a quieter, small group setting with fewer distractions from others. His voice volume and excitability level was often louder than regular students, so it was more effective to work with him in a small classroom. Kaden, on the other hand, was able to work well in any setting and adjusted better to changes in the schedule than James.

Analysis of Data

The data that was collected over the course of the research consisted of memorization of sight words, reading fluency, spelling accuracy, engagement in multisensory activities, and survey results. I recorded and analyzed the results weekly on data collection forms found in Appendices A-G. The results of my study proved that through slow introduction and continuous review of sight words, with various multisensory activities, the two students made significant gains in memorization of words and reading fluency.

The main data collection area focused around sight word memorization. Both students had memorized only one common sight word at the beginning of the year, were unable to decode basic short vowel words (for example cap, cat, dog), and were not reading independently. When the research began January 14, 2014, James had memorized 35 words and Kaden memorized 38 words. Throughout the study, the mastery of sight words was inconsistent for both students. It was common to have a particular word memorized four weeks in a row and then forgotten on Week Five. Kaden often attempted to guess another word that started with the same letter (for example word would) or another word that rhymed (for example where there) with the word. James did not attempt a guess at unfamiliar words but stated in a firm voice that he did not know that word or he had never seen that word. The most difficult words to memorize noted from spelling test results or through flashcard review were words that began with /th/ or /wh/ (consonant digraphs) or were irregular words problematic to decode (for example was could).

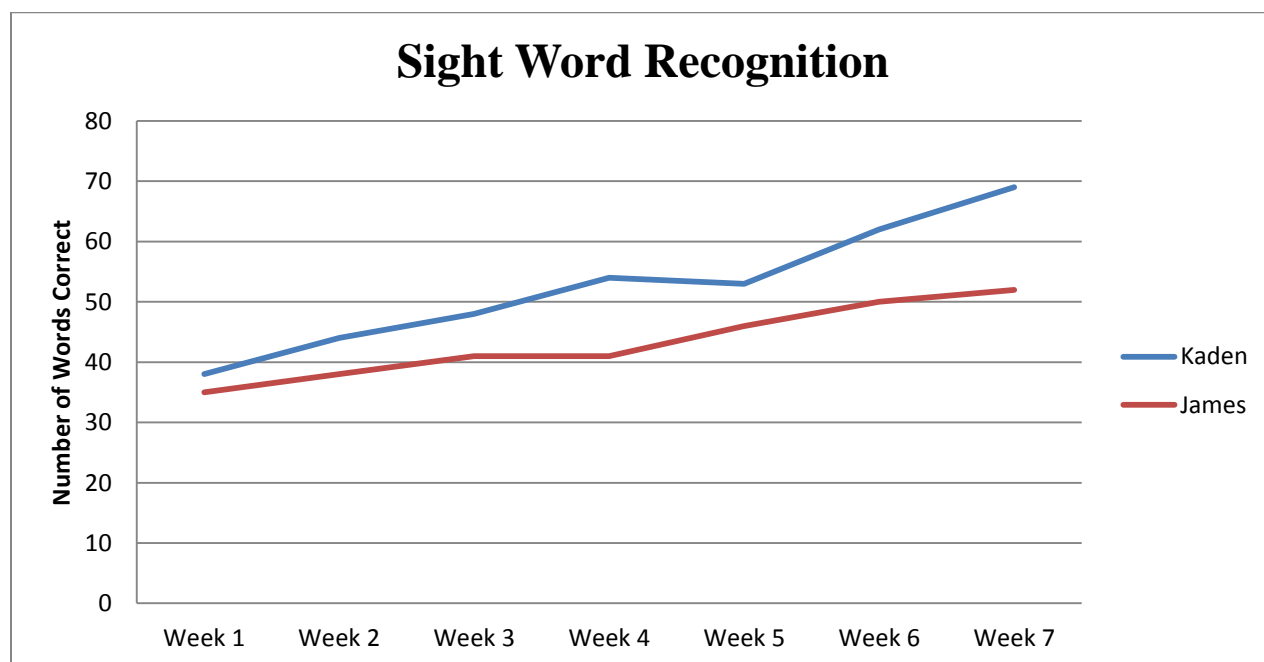


Figure 1. This graph displays sight word data collected over the six week study. The data collection form is located in Appendix A.

Students were flashed a set of sight words and had to recall the word from memory within three seconds. Both students improved significantly over the timeframe. More gains were made during these six weeks than during the first sixteen weeks of school. In my opinion, Kaden made more gains than James due to a longer attention span during activities and a more supportive home setting. Based on the analysis of research, continuous repetition of sight words with a slow, consistent pace, worked very well with these two students who have weaker memory and shorter attention spans than typical second graders. The constant review made it possible for the students to increase their reading achievement.

The AIMSweb assessment of reading fluency was used to monitor fluency and accuracy with reading (See Appendix F) (AIMSweb Pearson). The AIMSweb reading results were used to determine if students were at risk and qualified for additional reading services, such as special education or Title 1 reading. At the beginning of the year, both students were reading zero words per minute with zero percent accuracy. At the beginning of the research study, Kaden read twelve words per minute with 61% accuracy and James read six words per minute with 50% accuracy. Both students were reading first grade passages.

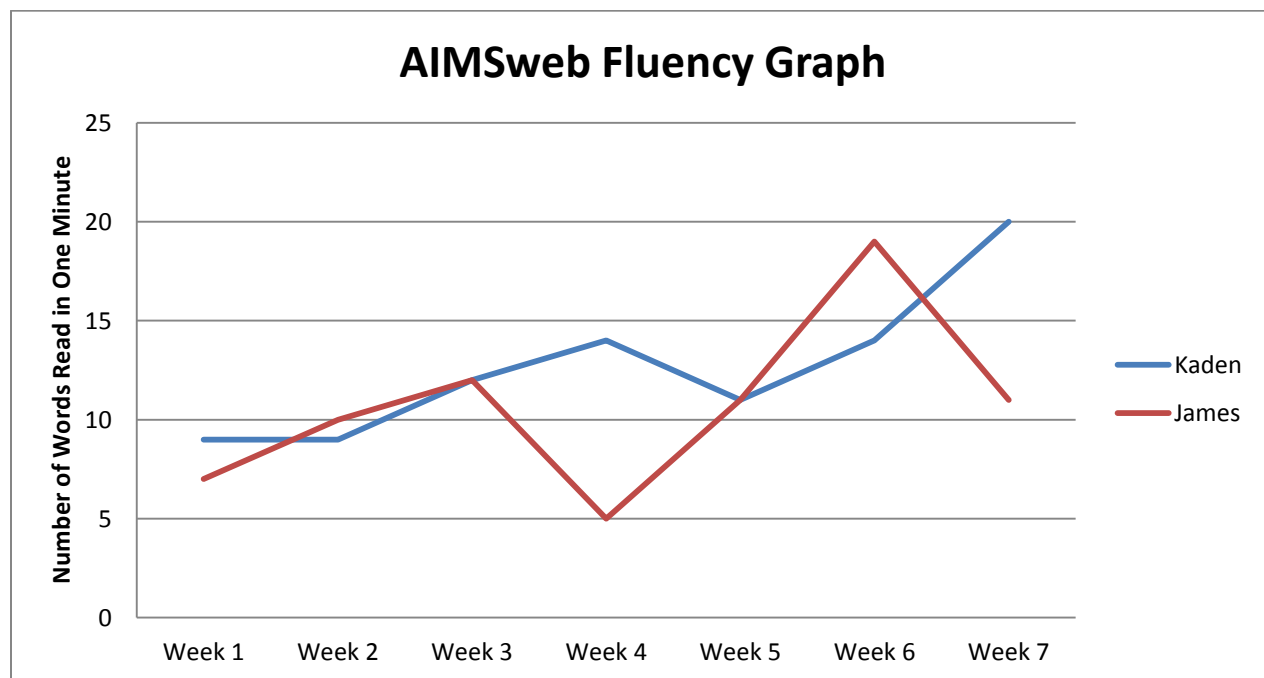


Figure 2. AIMSweb Fluency Graph. This graph displays the results as each student read a first grade passage for one minute weekly for a six week period.

Figure 2 indicates considerable growth in reading fluency of these students over the six week research study. Kaden's growth doubled over the six week period as he continued to improve with word recognition and used reading strategies while he read the passages. James' growth varied more than Kaden's growth due to his shorter attention span and less motivation to read his best each time he was assessed. Overall, he did make gains in reading fluency. The gains were more significant than the small growth from the beginning of the year until January, from zero words per minute to approximately eight words per minute. Both students moved from level B to level C books over the course of the study. Level C books are less repetitive and introduce more words than Level B.

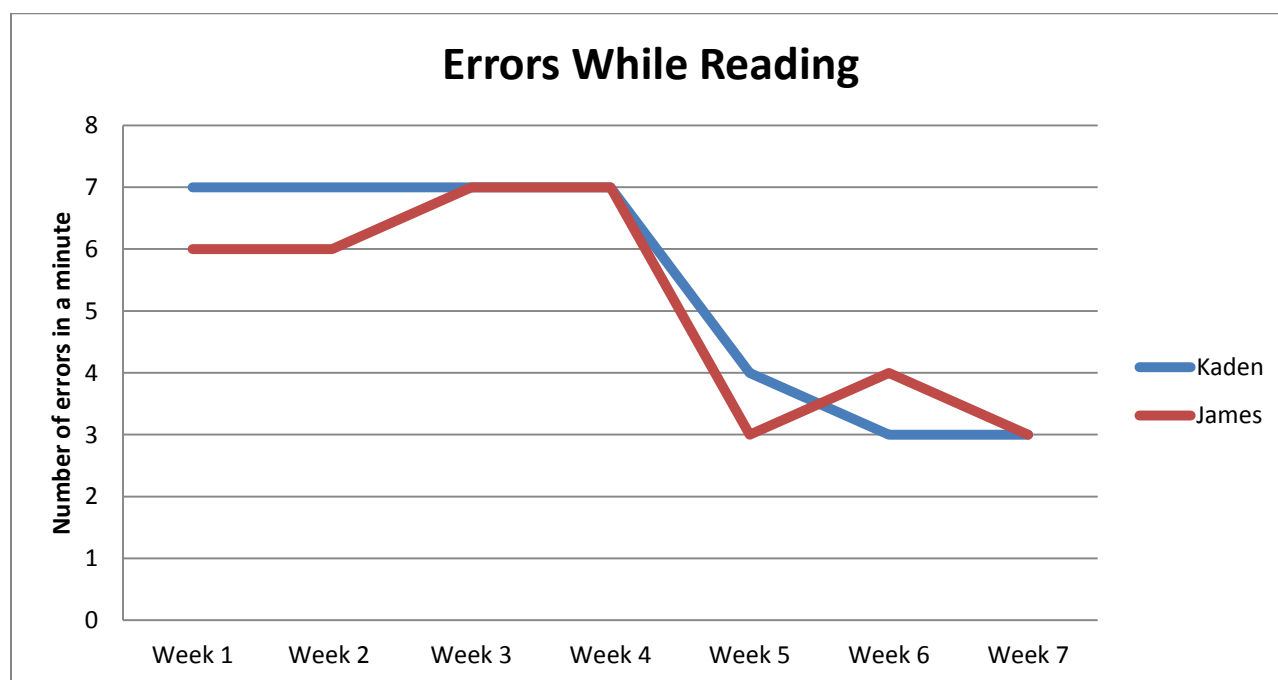


Figure 3. This graph indicates data of the number of errors when students read a first grade passage for one minute. Errors include words skipped or read incorrectly.

The accuracy graph shows considerable progress since the students self-corrected more errors without teacher assistance. Earlier in the study, the students were making as many errors as words correct; thus the passage did not make sense to the reader or listener. These fluency gains may be attributed to more consistent mastery of sight words as students used strategies while reading independently.

Spelling accuracy was also analyzed and recorded to determine if the students could recall how to spell high frequency sight words and short vowel families. Figure 4 shows the results each week from an eight point spelling test with four of Fry's (1999) common sight words and four word family words. Both students were able to earn six to eight points weekly. Occasionally, the students earned a 100% on a test. Oftentimes a word that was easy to spell during the week was completely forgotten on the test due to weaker memory. Kaden's family practiced at home; James's family did not practice homework or spelling, although both boys performed similarly on the spelling test weekly. During one particular test, Kaden missed the word /you/ and left it blank since he could not recall the sound of /y/. This error was a common occurrence for Kaden, in which he spelled the word correctly during the week but had weaker memory on the test. James made minor errors with letter sounds, such as spelling the word /bug/ as /dug/. It was common for both students to confuse the /b/ and /d/ sounds, as well as digraphs (for example /sh/ /ch/) and blends (for example /gr/ /dr/).

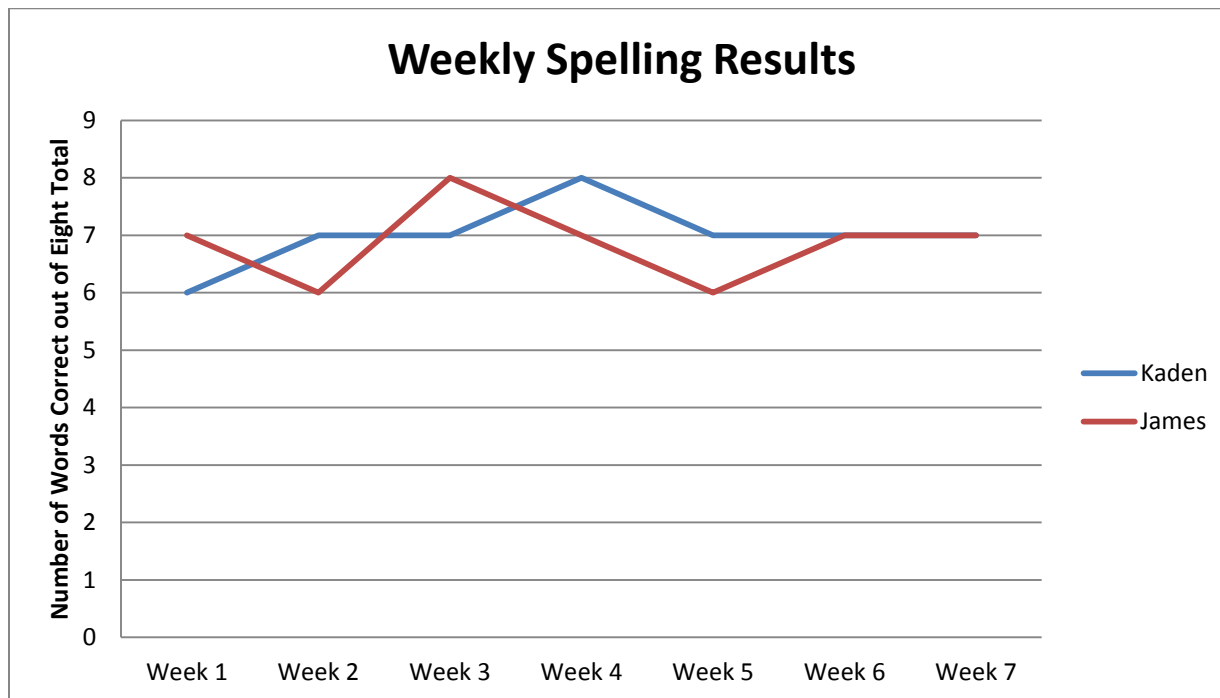


Figure 4. This graph displays results of weekly first grade modified spelling lists with a total of eight words possible.

Many multisensory, kinesthetic, and tactile activities were used to help with long-term memorization of words. An engagement chart was used to record minutes on and off task during activities. According to the charts below, BINGO and Racetrack kept the students on task as words were recalled continuously throughout the lesson. During Racetrack, the students read the words quickly while they drove a toy car along the track. During BINGO, the students were asked to read the word drawn from a bag and find it on their board immediately. Boggle and Scrabble used fewer words and were less effective than BINGO and Racetrack. Building Words with Tiles was very effective for targeting beginning, middle and ending sounds and how to manipulate words to make new words (for example saw was). However, the students were

distracted with the letter tiles and required reminders to stay on task and engaged throughout the lesson. The letter tiles were often flipped over by the students, and the vowel /u/ suddenly became the consonant /n/, which caused confusion throughout the lesson. Often the letters /b/ and /d/ were reversed and flipped, thus created the letter /p/, or the unfamiliar /q/. In the end, the students enjoyed word building, especially the creation of their own words.

Figures 5, 6, and 7 below show the time that the students were engaged in three different multisensory activities: Racetrack, BINGO, and Word Building with Tiles. This information assisted with research decisions on which activities to use more often during the research study. Consistently, Kaden was on task and only slightly distracted with the letter tiles during word building. These charts showed James's behavior being more on and off task than Kaden. James regularly discussed unrelated topics, refused to participate, or became too active within his seat to engage properly in some of the activities. Since Kaden was more compliant, decisions regarding which activities to use were based on what worked best for James.

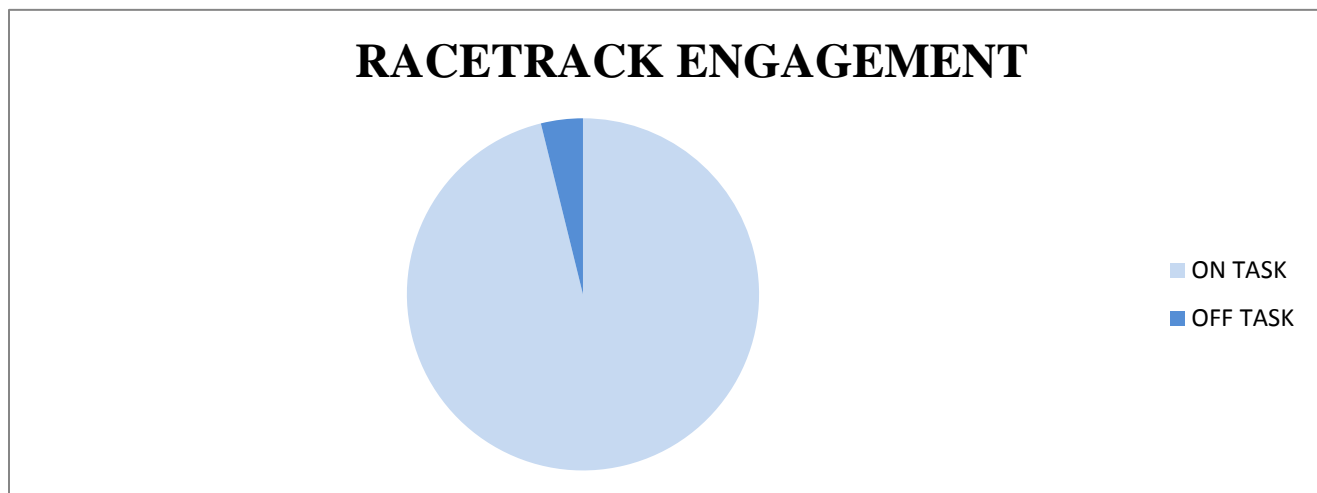


Figure 5. The Racetrack engagement graph shows the involvement of students with reading words while they drove toy cars around a game board track.

This activity was very motivating since the students were interested in cars and racing. The students were on task for 150 minutes and only off task six minutes throughout the research study. These results were amazing, considering the weaker attention spans of both students. The students took ownership of their learning during this successful activity.

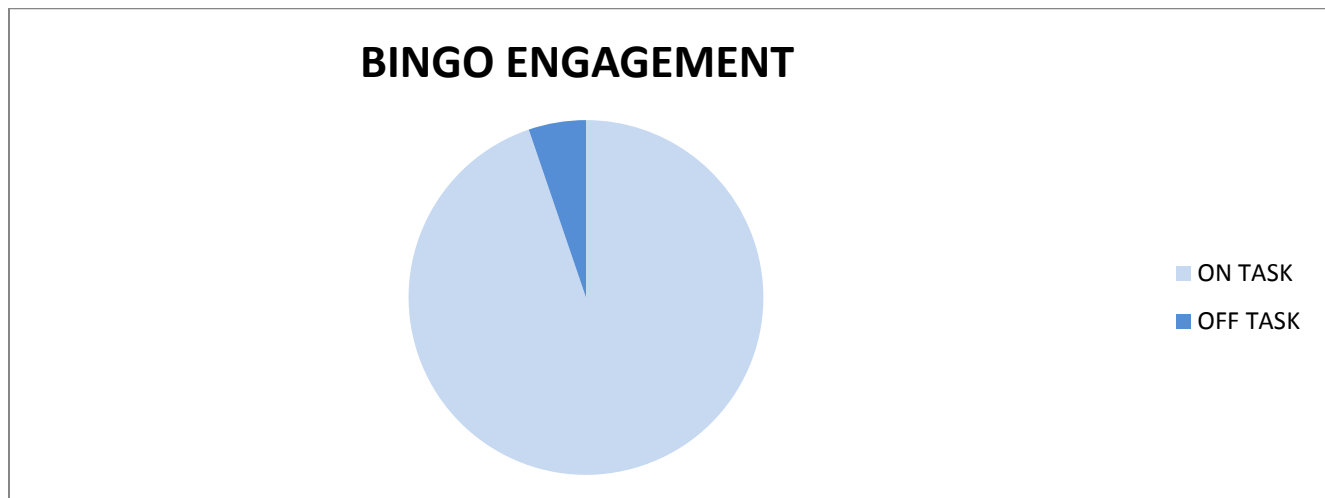


Figure 6. This pie graph shows engagement of students in the BINGO game activity. Over the course of six weeks, the students were on task 58 minutes and only off task five minutes.

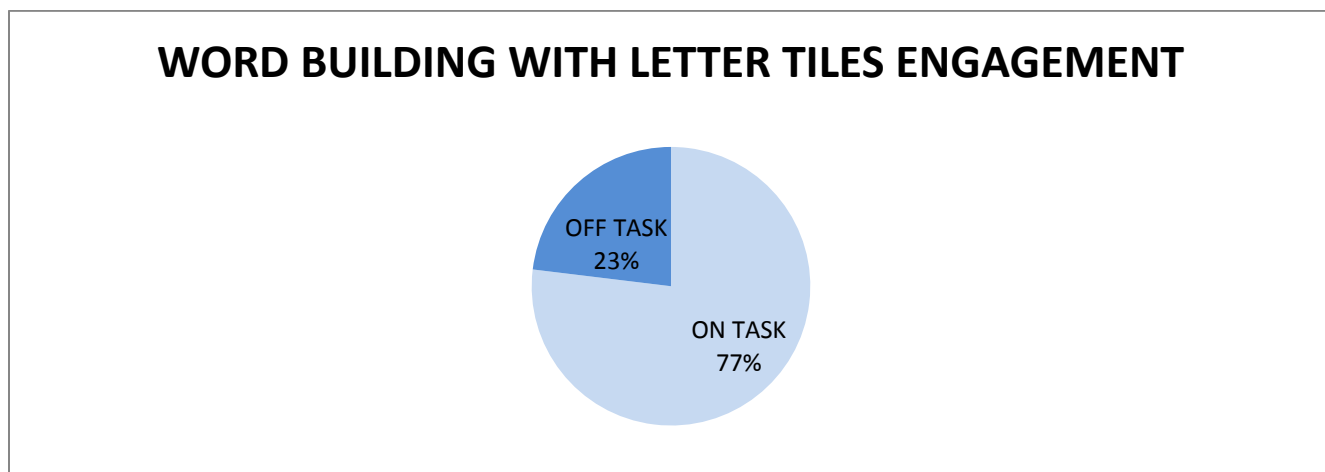


Figure 7. According to this pie graph, the students were on task for 100 minutes or 77% of the time and off task for 30 minutes or 23%.

Word Building with Tiles was used less often than the other activities due to the time off task and the number of distractions. However, this activity was beneficial in learning how to decode words and the correct position of letters to create an actual word, which was essential to reading.

During the research study, the students were given a survey to find out which activities the students felt were most effective for learning. These students had limited verbal and speech articulation, so questions were rephrased or possible choices were given throughout the survey. When questioned about which activities were preferred, James enjoyed the Racetrack activity since he felt he could drive the cars fast along the track. BINGO was another favorite as his face lit up each time he found a word on the board, not just when he got a BINGO. Since there are many words on the BINGO board, he felt that he learned a lot each time he played it. If he were able to choose how to study his words he would play BINGO and ABCya, an online computer resource. Kaden also enjoyed the toy race cars but made a quieter engine noise than James. He showed less emotion than James when he played BINGO but seemed engaged in any learning game. Kaden was very passive and compliant, willing to work under any setting.

When asked which words were most difficult to read, James chose the word /when/ since the /wh/ and /e/ are hard for him to read. He often showed irritation when he attempted a word with a /th/ sound since it was difficult for him to articulate the sound. Kaden chose the word /their/ since the /eir/ part was hard for him. Both students expressed frustration with how words look similar and contain many unfamiliar sounds (for example /sh/ /ea/ /th/).

James spent time at his friend's house or played video games with his older brother, rather than reading. Kaden stated that he read books to his cat or little sister and wrote spelling words at home with his parents often. There appeared to be a definite contrast between both households in regards to the amount of time spent on reading and spelling activities. I held a conference with both parents, separately, to discuss the action research plan, and the parent notification letter (See Appendix G). Both parents agreed to the study and were pleased to have the curriculum modified for their child.

Action Plan

The impact on student learning has been profound during this study. There were more gains in six short weeks than in the first sixteen weeks of school. Both students nearly doubled the number of common sight words memorized and their reading fluency rate, thus made a huge decrease in the number of reading errors. Both students began to self-correct errors and progressed from reading level B to level C. Most of all, the students developed the confidence to read and write independently. Since both students were exposed to the appropriate text at their independent reading level with repeated reading, significant progress occurred during this study. This confirms Marzano's (2011) belief that the nature of the text influences how children learn words. He believes text with too many new words effects fluency and comprehension.

According to this research study, these students were able to memorize words when introduced at a slow rate with continuous repetition of previously practiced words and rereading familiar text daily. Students with weaker memory and shorter attention span need many more exposures than average readers to acquire memorization. Exposure to words multiple times

through many diverse multisensory activities helped these students stay engaged and successful throughout the study. This confirms Huang's et al., (2008) and Falk's et al., (2003) assertion that repeated readings can increase fluency and memorization of sight words when implemented daily. It was an exciting day when both Kaden and James discovered how to write sentences without assistance on every single word. I noticed a more positive attitude toward reading and writing than at the start of the study. The ownership of learning traveled from teacher to student.

The results of my research study changed my teaching practice in many ways. First and foremost, at the beginning of each school year, I plan to set up a differentiated learning plan for students who need curriculum modification and continue the plan through the entire year. This plan will include collaboration with all specialists who work with any of my students who struggle with sight word acquisition. I will determine how many words to expose students to weekly, based on cognitive abilities, attention span, reading fluency and memory capacity. Supplementing learning with many multisensory, kinesthetic, and tactile activities will be an important aspect of daily lessons to aid with engagement and memorization of words. I will continue to explore useful resources that work well with memorization of words. An engagement chart will be used to record on and off task behavior to indicate which activities work best for particular students. Additionally, I plan to use rereading strategies with more repetition of text to build fluency as I investigate effective methods for increasing fluency. Finally, I will continue this action research throughout the remainder of the school year.

One of the students in the study, James, moved to Tennessee this month. Therefore, I sent copies of his differentiated educational plan to his new teacher to aid in awareness of his learning styles and academic needs. The other student, Kaden, will attend summer school for six weeks so I will continue the modified educational plan with him and collaborate with all specialists who work with him. I will request a tutor to work with Kaden daily on sight words and fluency, as well as multisensory games since he will need more one-on-one assistance with learning than the other students. Even with fourteen weeks of summer vacation, I expect Kaden's regression in reading to be minimal due to extra support during summer school and family support at home.

When school starts this fall, I plan to pass along the information on Kaden's modified educational plan to his third grade instructor. The plan will need adjustments periodically based on increases in fluency and memorization of more sight words as the year progresses. My hope is that the collaboration among teachers will be as strong next year as it was this year.

Since students with specific learning disabilities may be overwhelmed with the amount of information to memorize, understand, and read in the regular classroom, it is vital for teachers to make adjustments in the curriculum for all students to feel successful in learning. I will continue to study ways to practice sight word memorization efficiently and productive strategies to increase fluency among all students.

The results from my research study will be shared with educators in my school through a PowerPoint presentation. I believe many teachers want to help students who are significantly behind class expectations, but lack the resources to modify curriculum effectively. It is my duty, as an educator, to pass along strategies and useful techniques that aid in changing the academic growth of students with specific learning disabilities.

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