Explicit teaching of onset and rime will assist grade 1 students to recode letter clusters when reading prose.

Abstract

Several studies have demonstrated that phonological awareness is an important variable which influences the acquisition of efficient literacy skills for students. Furthermore, the research found that different level of phonological awareness needs to be considered. Therefore , the purpose of this study was to identify the level of phonological knowledge of two (2) year 1 students who were in the bottom 20 percentile with reading achievement. The area of reading that needed to be improved was at word level. When running records were taken, both students used distinctive visual features of words to read and in the Rime Unit test, they converted each letter to individual sounds. The students were given systematic lessons in one aspect of phonological awareness that was a deficit in all pre-testing results, onset and rime. The pre and post tests results were compared to test my hypothesis: *Explicit teaching of onset and rime will assist grade 1 students to recode letter clusters when reading prose*

The results of the study support the hypothesis that students improve in their reading of prose after participating in an Intervention Program which specifically meets their needs at the point of entry to the program. Thus, linking reading difficulties with teaching and learning is paramount to improved student outcomes in the area of phonological awareness

Introduction

Students who have a low level of reading achievement usually have not mastered sufficient strategies to help them to efficiently read prose.

The grade one students in this study mainly use the initial letter to identify unknown words when reading and or they convert each letter to a sound and blend. They have not yet developed an understanding of sound patterns. The sounding out of each letter is particularly demanding of students' attention and they have a limited bank of words which they read with automaticity. The students have what Munro (2007, pg. 24) describes as "slow naming speed and phonological deficit – 'double-deficit hypothesis of reading disability". The students do not use analogy or use what they know about some words to solve unfamiliar words. Several research articles emphasis that the level of phonological awareness which students' have in place is the best predictor of reading ability. (Munro, 1996; Munro, 1998; Munro, 2000; Anthony et al, 2007: Schuele and Boudreau, 2008: Vloegraven and Verhoeven, 2007.)

(Anthony et al, 2007) investigated the correlation between Phonological Awareness, Phonological Memory and Phonological Processing Abilities (RAN) in relation to literacy acquisition. He found that "the PA, PM and RAN are distinguishable from each other and from general cognitive ability" Anthony et al (2007). Also, his research showed that Phonological Awareness was the major variable which influenced differences in reading words. However, phonological memory and phonological awareness were linked, as any tasks which involves decoding sounds uses short term memory to add to students' working memory in order to process the information in

texts.(Anthony et al 2007) Similar findings showed that phonological awareness was linked with memory capacity (Wagner, et al. 1993: cited in Munro, 2000). This study suggests an association between the number of phonemes to be manipulated in words and the phonological knowledge base students' have in place. If students are expected to manipulate unfamiliar words they need to draw on short term memory ability to solve phonemic awareness tasks because they do not have the stored knowledge base

Although Munro, (2000) acknowledges that the proposition put forward by (Wager et al 1993) was worthwhile, he suggests that the knowledge base was not specifically stated. He examined the components of phonological knowledge base and suggests that there are a number of sound properties which intersect as a system. The students proceed along a continuum with the sounds of spoken words leading to "the capacity to represent the sound properties of spoken words through implicit awareness of stored rime in words, an explicit awareness of onset and rime to an explicit awareness of phonemes" (Lencher et al., 1990 cited in Munro, 2000).

Munro (2000) suggests that phonological knowledge can be seen as a set of units which are made up of different types of sound patterns, with each unit being of different value .As students are able to articulate some sound units they use this knowledge base to work out other, higher value sound patterns. Thus, students develop their system of sound links. He proposed that the number of sounds students are able to handle indicates how sophisticated their sound system is. The greater the number of phonemes students can connect in order to encode words, influences reading ability. Munro (2000, pg. 5) noted

that “span increases with the extent to which links in phonemic knowledge facilitate the ability to chunk phonemic information”. Thus, students need to be able to match phonemes to the series of sounds in words to acquire some sort of automaticity. If students have not developed automaticity when reading a small number of sounds, they will probably not move on to solve longer sound sequences. Consequently, the difference between individual students’ reading can be linked to their phonemic network. Munro (2000) concluded that “the phonemic awareness span is more an index of the extent of elaboration or differentiation of phonological knowledge than a measure of short term memory”.

(Vloedgroven and Verhoeven, 2007) studied the degree of phonological awareness using different test items. They explored the notion of measuring growth in relation to the grade level of students and whether there may be under developed ability or several connected abilities of the participants. When they looked at different levels of difficulty of test items, they also investigated the consonant-vowel structure of the tasks. Their findings found that the consonant-vowel structure was not directly linked to phoneme blending but rather that the consonant-vowel structure in segmenting longer words was more difficult to separate into phonemes. The more consonants added to the cluster of a word, the more challenging the tasks.

(Schuele and Boudreau, 2008) emphasis that phonological awareness can be improved by including instruction in curriculum as early as kindergarten as well as intervention strategies to develop phonological awareness for older students who experience

difficulties decoding words. In order to meet the specific needs of individual students, teachers need to be armed with the knowledge of how to transfer research findings into practice to achieve the appropriate outcomes for students. Schuele and Boudreau (2008) also found that the length and intensity of the intervention is not specific to outcomes but rather that a little intervention goes a long way to helping students.

The present investigation aims to implement strategies which target specific needs of students, they need to develop explicit phonemic awareness. The students need to develop more efficient comprehending strategies, at word level, to read prose.

The hypothesis is: *Explicit teaching of onset and rime patterns will assist grade 1 students to recode letter clusters when reading prose.*

Method

Design

This study uses the XOX design in which, improved comprehending strategies when reading prose, following explicit teaching of onset and rime, is monitored for 2 grade one students The study compares the pre and post test results for each student. There was no control group.

Participants

The students attend an inner city parochial school. Initially, they were identified as being in the lowest 20 percentile for reading achievement in grade one, using the literacy post-tests in their preparatory year. When reading accuracy was assessed again early in the grade one year, the participants were identified as eligible to enter the Reading Recovery Program. The average reading level for their grade one cohorts was level 20. Both

students have English as their first language, student A, a male aged 6 years 3 months and student B, a female age 6years 6 months. Student A attained level 6 and student B level 1 when reading accuracy was assessed using benchmark texts. The participants' text knowledge of letter clusters was limited, therefore they had difficulty with manipulating sounds in words. Both students had completed 10 lessons in Roaming the Known with the Reading Recovery Teacher, before they began the Intervention Program. The students' entry reading level and chronological age at testing time are shown in table 1. Student B was just above instructional level in accuracy but running records were taken reading levels 2 and 3 and both came out hard with 75% accuracy.

TABLE 1

	Student A	**Student B**
Age	**6years 3months**	**6years 6months**
Reading Levels	**Level 6 - Bedtime**	**Level 1 – My Clothes**
Accuracy	**92%**	**96%**

Materials

*Sutherland Phonological Awareness Test which assesses knowledge of: Syllabic and Subsyllabic Level, Phonemic Level (CVC), Phonemic Level (Blends) and Grapheme-Phoneme Correspondences.

*Dalheim (2004) Rime Unit test.

*AlpaAssess Benchmark Texts – *Oxford University Press*

*Love, E and Reilly, S. ' Sounds Rhymes 'texts.

*Three sets of flashcard for each rime unit.

Procedure

The teaching procedure was based on the teaching activities suggested in John Munro (1998a)

*quickly identify words on flashcards.

*each student re- read text

*teacher read text

*identify the rime in story.

*discuss shared sound pattern.

*discuss the meaning of words and put into sentences

*blend spoken words

*blend segmented words into onset and rime.

*students reflect on their learning.

During lesson 1 the students worked with a rime that they both identified in the Rime Unit test. In lessons 2 – 9 one rime unit was introduced each day, working with 8 examples of the rime. Session 10 was taken up with the administration of the post tests. The lessons were not on consecutive days because of changes to the school timetables. Students were withdrawn from the classroom for 20 minutes sessions. The lessons were conducted in a quiet room, without interruptions and each session followed the same format as in lesson 1, with the story and rime unit changing each day.

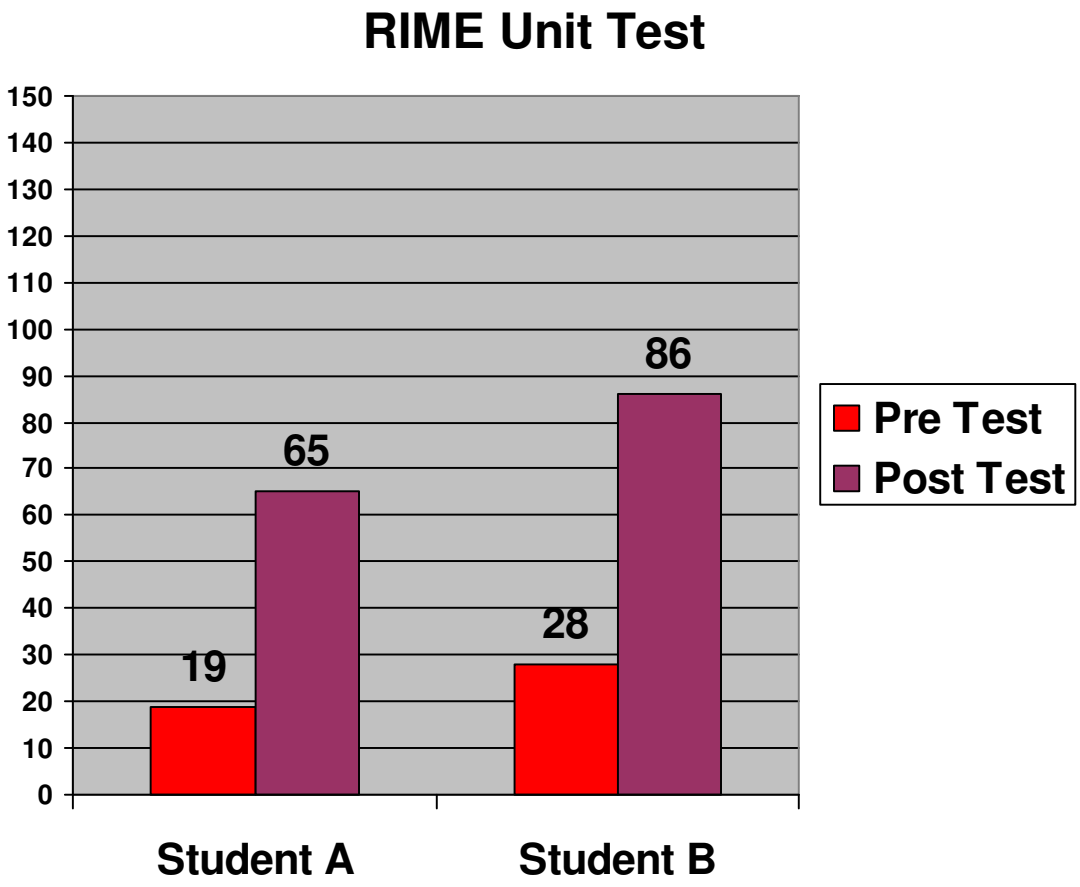
Session Outline 1

Phonological Awareness

Activity	Task
Read target words	Teacher flash cards containing target words "at". Students read each word accurately.
Text Reading	Teacher read "Poor Fat Cat". Students identify rime unit in story. Discuss shared sound pattern.
Demonstrate word meanings	Students give the meaning of words "splat" and "flat". Both students put each word into a sentence. fat, hat, rat, that, bat, mat, flat and splat.
Blending Task	Teacher sounds out the target words and students say the whole word.
Blending segmented Words	Each student given a set of flashcards with each word cut into the onset and rime. Students reassemble words and read them.
Reflection	Students were asked to articulate what they had learnt during the session.

Results

The results indicate support for the hypothesis that explicit teaching of onset and rime will assist grade one students to read prose more efficiently. Both students demonstrated improvement in reading accuracy, moving up levels using the benchmark texts. Although the students were not assessed using texts with the target rimes in them, eight of the rimes taught were dependable rimes and the texts students read contained a high percentage of one or more than one syllable words, giving them a sense of rhythmic language.



In the pre-testing of Rime Unit knowledge student A achieved the lowest score however he attempted to read a greater number of words than student B. Both students were unable to read words with more than 2 sound rime units in them. However, both students made considerable gains, reading the targeted rimes in the post-test. Also, both students were prepared to complete the list, with much encouragement. I believe that their self-efficacy had improved, therefore, they were willing to 'have-a-go' at reading a greater number of words.

Student A was able to read 46 more words in the Rime Unit post –test and these included some words with 3 sound rime units as well as several (VVC) words. None of these words were included in the intervention sessions. However, he was unable to read some 5 letter – 2 sound rime words with the target rimes in them.

Analysis of Errors – Student A

The predominant error Student A made was to substitute sound clusters. Examples of these were: chunk-chick, thaw-that, bank – back, tank – tick, stink – stick, junk – jump, thick – thin,

In several errors the beginning letter was identified correctly. Examples of these words were cake – ceep, bell – ball, ring – real, mine – mill, wink – wik.

The words which were the greatest challenge were words containing – VCe. Examples of these were: rice – ray, fine – fire, woke – walk, sale – stay, mine – mill. He did not attempt to sound out individual letters.

Student B was able to read 58 more words in the Rime Unit post-test, including several 4 letter – 3 sound rime units and 7 words containing VVC rimes. The majority of correct

responses were read automatically. She did a lot of self-talking throughout the test when she came to a word not recognized automatically.

Analysis of errors- Student B.

Student B sounded out individual letters with most of the words containing –VCe rimes. Examples of these were: ame, ice, ide, ine, oke, ale. However, she did automatically read 'ate' and 'ore' rimes.

She substituted only two rimes, these were 'ank' drank – drunk, 'ell' bell - bill. In the Rime Unit pre-test there was a difference of 9 words read between the two students. However the gap widened in the post-test results,with the difference being 21 words. Students A's responses were random, his substitutes often had the first letter correct, for example, mail – mik, flask – fire and then some groups of words with the same rime were read differently. The 'ail' rime words were read as tip, mik, splat and tik. Student B appears to have a more sophisticated knowledge base and her errors displayed an understanding of letters and single sounds. Although her recoding of sounds was incorrect, one could see how she arrived at her response.

Table 2 displays the results of the Sutherland Phonological Awareness Tests.

Table 2

SUBSETS								
	Syllabic & Subsyllabic		Phonemic (CVC)		Phonemic (blends)		Grapheme-Phoneme Correspondence	
Students	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test
A	16/16	16/16	12/16	13/16	2/12	2/12	4/14	5/14
B	14/16	16/16	16/16	15/16	6/12	10/12	8/14	9/14

Student A scored 6 standard deviations **below t**he mean in the pre-test and 4 standard deviations **below** the mean in the post-test. Student B scored 4 standard deviations **above** the mean in the pre-test and 10 standard deviations above the mean in the post-test. Both students achieved high scores at the Syllabic and Subsyllabic Level in pre and post test. Student A found it difficult to delete phonemes in subsets 10 and 11 and this lack of awareness of consonant blends was displayed in the non-word reading and non-word spelling tasks. Student B showed greater improvement in all of these four tasks.

Both students displayed gains in their use of comprehending strategies. They improved in their ability to work out unfamiliar words, they converted some letter clusters to sounds but neither student used analogy. Student A moved up 6 levels and Student B moved up 9 levels.

Table 3 shows the post test for reading achievement.

Table 3

	Student A	**Student B**
Age	**6years 5 months**	**6years 8 months**
Reading Level	**Level 12**	**Level 10**
Accuracy	**93%**	**93%**

Discussion

The post-test results from this study support the hypothesis that explicit teaching of phonological awareness, specifically onset and rime, will assist students when reading prose. Schuele and Boudreau (2008) did not specify what constitutes a little intervention. However, I believe that there needs to be a greater number of teaching sessions than in this study, to scaffold the students until they consistently demonstrate recalling what they have learnt about words when reading prose.

Both students were enthusiastic participants and they responded well to the structure of each session, they liked knowing the sequence of activities. The students particularly enjoyed the reading of each text and the blending of the segmented words. They were competitive when they had to re-assemble the flashcards of onset and rime. Student A was always slower to complete this task and in the earlier sessions he often added a phoneme to a word but his accuracy improved, the more sessions we had. The format

and length of each session were appropriate. However, it would have been better to use texts with a longer narrative structure,

The ultimate outcome of this study was that students would improve in their ability to read prose. Thus, they would read texts with longer and more complex structures, at higher levels. Indeed, both students did move up levels but student B had greater gains than student A even though she began at a much lower level. Perhaps her phonological abilities were latent because she missed a lot of learning time when she went overseas for a month during her year in preparatory. Also, there was minimal parental support with home reading.

As this study included only two students, I had an opportunity to closely observe each one. Student A appears to have a slight speech problem, although there is no reference to it in his school file. Munro (1998), stated that the process of using analogy with rime units involves processing abilities connected to the cognitive ability used in the language area of the brain and processing cluster and sounds can also be affected by the way individuals pronounce words. This may explain why Student A made random responses to several words in the Rime Unit test, if his speech is taken into consideration and the words did not match his spoken form of them.

The findings is this study support Munro (2000) where he found that students' ability to manipulate sounds is linked to the phonological base they have in place. The less sophisticated the phonological base, the fewer sounds they can manipulate. Therefore, students need to master words with fewer sounds in them before they can manipulate longer words. Although both students in this study were able to read some 3 sound rime units, which were not taught in the intervention program, they still need to build on their

sound knowledge base. In order to do this they need to be able to read a greater number of 2 sound rime units before they can manipulate longer words.

Vlograven and Verhoeven (2007) found that the CV structures did not influence phoneme blending but rather the type of CV structure did make a difference when segmenting longer words. The participants in this study had difficulty with segmenting in the SPAT Test. Their scores remained the same on the pre and post tests.

Schuele and Boudreau (2008) are in agreement with Vlograven and Verhoeven (2007). They suggest that children need a phonological base so as to benefit from general decoding teaching strategies. In order to activate this, children need to understand syllables and sounds. This understanding develops as does their ability to segment and blend different consonant structures. The authors suggest the teaching sequence for blending and segmenting should be introduced with CV and VC, CV and VC, CVC, CCVC and CVCC. The consonant structure they suggest is the most difficult to manipulate, make up the 3 sound rime units which were the most difficult for the participants in this study.

The intervention program was successful in bringing about change in students' phonological awareness. The gains made were valuable achievements, especially as Schuele and Boudreau (2008, p5) found that "segmenting and blending are recognized as critical skill achievements." I believe the major implication to come from this study is teacher education. They need to know what the components of phonological awareness are. Schuele and Boudreau (2008) suggest that there are different levels, ranging from a low to a deep level of awareness. Teachers need to be able to identify where their students are at and focus their teaching instruction at the point of need.

The school in the study implements the structure of CLaSS in the literacy program across the Prep – 2 classes, which was developed to meet student needs in small group activities. However, I believe that teachers' choose tasks in an ad hoc manner rather than systematically providing instruction in phonological awareness. There is a major emphasis on developing the sound-symbol relationship, rhyming, hearing syllables and recognition of high frequency words. There appears to be a gap in instruction, phonemic awareness is not explicitly developed.

The participants in this study had already been identified as 'at risk' because they were in the lowest 20 percentile for reading achievement. I could then follow through, to administer the Phonological Awareness Test, to inform my teaching. Generally, classroom teachers do not have such specific information. Even close observation when taking running records will not inform teachers about level of phonological awareness. Therefore, possible future research could investigate the level of reading achievement of preparatory students, after teachers have included explicit phonological awareness instruction. A crucial element of the investigation would be the administration of Phonological Assessment to all students on their entry to school. Then teachers could tailor their instructions to meet needs.

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Appendix 1

Target Rime Units.

Rime Unit	**3 letter words**	**4 letter words**	**5 letter words**
2 letter- **2 sound rine units**			
at	fat cat mat bat hat rat,	flat	splat
ip	Pip tip rip hip lip	ship slip grip	
og	log ,dog jog fog , bog hog	frog smog	
ay	Jay ray day hay say	play stay sway	
ed	Ned bed red Ted fed led	Fred shed	
3 letter- **2sound rime units**			
ock		lock rock tock sock frock	Block clock shock
ack		Jack pack back sack rack	black track stack
ill	ill	Jill Will hill fill mill hill	frill spill
ing		King sing ring wing ding	swing sting thing

Appendix 2

Texts. Authors. Love, Elizabeth. And Reilly, Sue. (2000) 'Sound Rhymes' *Oxford University Press.*

Session	Text	Vocabulary with target rime
1	Poor Fat Cat	fat cat rat mat hat flat bat
2	Pip's Trip	Pip's trip ship slip tip hip Rip grip lip
3	"Come for a Jog, Frog"	Jog Frog log Og smog dog fog
4	Please Stay, Jay	stay Jay sway tray spray play lay hay day
5	A Bed for Ned	Ned Fred shed Ted fed bed red
6	Mr. Block and His Clock	Lock rock block clock ticktock knock sock shock
7	Jack's Backpack	Back backpack Jack rack stack black snack sack
8	Jack and Jill, and Baby Will	Jill hill frill Bill ill mill Will spill
9	The King's Ring	King swing sing string ring wing

Appendix 3

Flashcards – 3 sets of cards

Session 1 fat, cat, mat, bat, hat, rat, splat

Sessions 2 Pip, tip, rip, hip, lip, ship, grip, slip

Session 3 log, dog, jog, fog, bog, hog, frog smog

Session 4 Jay, ray, day, hay, say, play, stay, sway

Sessions 5 Ned, bed, red, Ted, fed, led, Fred, Shed

Sessions 6 lock, rock, tock, sock, frock, block, clock, shock

Sessions 7 Jack, pack, back, sack, rack, black, track, stack

Sessions 8 Jill, Will, hill, fill, mill, hill, frill ill

Session 9 king, sing, ring, wing, ding, swing, sting, thing

Appendix 4

Outlines of Sessions 2 -9

Activity	Task
Reading – revision	Each student read text from previous session. Teacher flash card containing “at” words. Students read each word accurately.
Text Reading	Teacher read ‘ Pip’s Trip’. Students identify rime unit in story. Discuss shared sound pattern
Demonstrate word meanings	Students give meaning of words slip, grip and tip. Both students put each word into a sentence. Pip, tip, rip, hip, lip, ship, slip, grip.
Blending Task	Teacher sound out the target words and students say the whole word.
Blending segmented Words	Each student is given a set of flashcards with words cut into the onset and rime Students re-assemble words and read them.
Reflection	Students were asked to articulate what they had learnt during the session.

Activity	Task
Reading – revision	Each student read text from previous session. Teacher flash card containing “ip” and “at”words. Students read each word accurately.
Text Reading	Teacher read “Come for a Jog , Frog” Students identify rime unit in story. Discuss shared sound pattern
Demonstrate word meanings	Students give meaning of words fog, hog, smog, bog. Both students put each word into a sentence; log, dog, jog, fog, bog, hog, frog, smog.
Blending Task	Teacher sound out the target words and students say the whole word.
Blending segmented Words	Each student is given a set of flashcards with words cut into the onset and rime Students re-assemble words and read them.
Reflection	Students were asked to articulate what they had learnt during the session.

Activity	Task
Reading – revision	Each student read text from previous session. Teacher flash card containing at, ip and og words. Students read each word accurately.
Text Reading	Teacher read ‘ Please Stay Jay.’ Students identify rime unit in story. Discuss shared sound pattern
Demonstrate word meanings	Students give meaning of words ray and sway. Both students put each word into a sentence: Jay, ray, day, hay, say, play, stay, sway.
Blending Task	Teacher sound out the target words and students say the whole word.
Blending segmented Words	Each student is given a set of flashcards with words cut into the onset and rime Students re-assemble words and read them.
Reflection	Students were asked to articulate what they had learnt during the session.

Activity	Task
Reading – revision	Each student read text from previous session. Teacher flash card containing at, ip , og. ay. .Students read each word accurately.
Text Reading	Teacher read ‘ A Bed For Ned.’ Students identify rime unit in story. Discuss shared sound pattern
Demonstrate word meanings	Students give meaning of words .fed, led. Both students put each word into a sentence: Ned, bed, red, Ted, fed, led, Fred, shed.
Blending Task	Teacher sound out the target words and students say the whole word.
Blending segmented Words	Each student is given a set of flashcards with words cut into the onset and rime Students re-assemble words and read them.
Reflection	Students were asked to articulate what they had learnt during the session.

Activity	Task
Reading – revision	Each student read text from previous session. Teacher flash card containing at, ip , og. ay. and ed. words. Students read each word accurately.
Text Reading	Teacher read ‘ Mr. Block and His Clock. Students identify rime unit in story. Discuss shared sound pattern
Demonstrate word meanings	Students give meaning of words .tock, shock, frock and block. Both students put each word into a sentence: lock, rock, tock, sock, frock, block, clock, shock.
Blending Task	Teacher sound out the target words and students say the whole word.
Blending segmented Words	Each student is given a set of flashcards with words cut into the onset and rime Students re-assemble words and read them.
Reflection	Students were asked to articulate what they had learnt during the session.

Activity	Task
Reading - revision	Each student read text from previous session. Teacher flash card containing at, ip , og. ay. ed and ock. words. Students read each word accurately.
Text Reading	Teacher read Jack's Backpack.. Students identify rime unit in story. Discuss shared sound pattern
Demonstrate word meanings	Students give meaning of words .rack, crack, stack. Both students put each word into a sentence: Jack, pack, back, sack, rack, black, track, stack.
Blending Task	Teacher sound out the target words and students say the whole word.
Blending segmented Words	Each student is given a set of flashcards with words cut into the onset and rime Students re-assemble words and read them.
Reflection	Students were asked to articulate what they had learnt during the session.

Activity	Task
Reading – revision	Each student read text from previous session. Teacher flash cards containing at, ip, og, ay, ed, ock and ack words. Student read each word accurately.
Text Reading	Teacher 'Jack and Jill, and Baby Will' Students identify rime in story. Discuss shared sound pattern.
Demonstrate word meanings	**S**tudents give meaning of words, mill, frill and spill.. Both students put each word into a sentence. Jill, Will, hill, fill, mill, frill, ill, spill.
Blending Task	Teacher sound out the target words and students say the whole word.
Blending segmented Words	Each student is given a set of flashcards with words cut into onset and rime. Students re-assemble words and read them.
Reflection	Students were asked to articulate what they had learnt during each session.

Acticity	Task
Reading – revision	Each student read text from previous session. Teacher flash cards with at, ip, og, ay, ed, ock, ack and ill words. Students read each word accurately,
Text Reading	Teacher read 'The King's Ring' Students identify rime unit in story. Discuss shared pattern.
Demonstrate word meanings	Students give meaning of words, ding and sting. Both students put each word into a sentence. King, sing, ring, wing, ding,swing, sting, thing.
Blending task	Teacher sound out the target words and students say the whole word.
Blending segmented Words	Each student is given a set of flashcards with words cut into the onset and rime. Students re-assemble words and read them.
Reflection	Students were asked to articulate what they had learnt during the session.