

*“Teaching onset and rime units will improve reading self efficacy in year 3 students with special behavioural needs.”*

### **Abstract:**

This study compares results before and after focused teaching in a small group situation of rime units and the segmenting of words containing rime units. It is anticipated that the year 3 students with special behavioural needs will apply the knowledge gained from taught rime units to reading unknown words. It is intended that the students self efficacy will improve because of improved reading accuracy. Two year 3 students were given 10 sessions of explicit teaching of onset and rime over a 3 week period involving rime bingo and a computer program designed to improve word knowledge and spelling skills. Word accuracy and reading ability was tested before and at the conclusion of the intervention. Self Efficacy was also tested prior to the commencement of the sessions and at the end of the sessions. The results revealed improvement in taught areas as well as an improvement in reading accuracy and comprehension. The students self efficacy improved with an increase in word knowledge and a marked improvement in reading was evident with the two students who participated in the intervention. As a result of the research it has been recommended that both students continue use the computer to assist them with their word skills and that the teacher continue to reinforce and teach rime units within the classroom setting.

### **Introduction**

Many students with behavioural issues experience difficulty in learning to read. There are many aspects which connected and involved in the process of gaining proficiency in reading. It is possible however to target the isolate areas which may be causing difficulty to a student in the belief that improvement in a particular area will have an impact on reading as a whole. One area that many students exhibit some difficulty with is the explicit use of rime units. This can impact on overall reading acquisition. Alongside this is the evidence that phonological awareness is related to reading achievement (Stanovich, Cunningham & Cramer, 1984).

This study is about four students in year 3 who have been diagnosed with special behavioural needs and who have experienced reading difficulties throughout Prep, Year One and Year Two. It is predicted by their classroom teacher that poor word and letter cluster knowledge combined with inefficient word reading strategies may have hindered these students progress. It is for this reason that explicit teaching of rime units was chosen for this study as research has proven that learning to read and write involves giving attention to the onset and rime sound units and linking them to spelling patterns. (Juel & Minden-Cupp, 2001). The hypothesis for this study is “*Teaching onset and rime units will improve reading self efficacy in year 3 students with special behavioural needs.*” Poor behaviour during class teaching activities and during explicit teaching of some concepts could also have hindered their progress in reading also. It has been suggested that students with emotional and behavioural disorders are at a high risk of both academic and social failure. (Al-Otaiba, Koorland & Rivers, 2006) These students often fall behind academically in the classroom which also can escalate their poor behaviour as well. For many reasons these students are removed from the mainstream classroom for periods of time in order to control their behavioural outbursts. Students with emotional behavioural disorder therefore often have two goals ; one to be re integrated back into the mainstream classroom and to improve their academic ability which in many cases can be specifically linked to their reading ability. Poor reading ability often prevents these students from making acceptable progress and therefore holds them back from inclusion into the mainstream classroom. (Al-Otaiba, Koorland & Rivers, 2006) Research also provides us with sound proof that children who do not make progress after a year of instruction continue to fall further behind their age peers. (Iversen, 1997). The students involved in this intervention have fallen behind their peers in reading fluently, word decoding and displaying and understanding of functional letter cluster knowledge such as onset (the initial consonant or consonant cluster of a word) and rime (the vowel and following letter string in rhyme- often referred to as word families or phonograms). Bandura (1986) also said that self doubt hinders the application of previously learnt skills and that both poor self efficacy and high self efficacy can cause problems with a students learning. For instance in high self efficacy the student may feel that they don’t need to invest too much time and energy into learning. Bandura (1986)

also said that “Perceived self-efficacy contributes to the development of subskills, as well as draws upon them in fashioning new behaviour patterns” Bandura (1986) (Pg 395.)

Perhaps a future study could be to analyze whether students behavior also improves with increased self efficacy and improved reading skills. Bandura (1986) also implied that if the expectations of attainment are clear than self efficacy can become a form of regulator on achievement and that success raises efficacy whereas failure lowers it.

According to Westwood (2001) children with learning difficulties tend to have problems in three important interrelated areas. These are phonemic awareness, phonic decoding skills and word recognition. Current relative literature discussing the teaching of reading, specifically determine that the concept of onset and rime is one important component of phonological awareness and that students who can read are phonemically aware.

Manning & Kato (2006) Goswami (2000) states: “It is probably true to say that every study that has measured the relationship between phonemic awareness and progress in reading has found a positive connection” (pg 255) Rapid orthographic naming provides readers with the skills to make sense of letter clusters and patterns. At a Word level of understanding readers may know letter-sound links but may display difficulty segmenting words into sounds or into onset-rime and therefore are unable to blend a sequence of sounds into a word.

The use of analogy to assist reading a new word is perhaps not stressed enough in the early teaching of reading strategies. Therefore some readers experiencing difficulties have few strategies to call upon when facing unknown words in text. In using analogy the reader thinks about and manipulates what they already know about words.

Competent word solvers have a large repertoire of strategies to draw from and use flexibly. (Pinnell & Fountas, 1998)

Strategies to utilize vary from learner to learner. It may be that some learners need to analyze words at a phoneme level before they can successfully make analogies involving rime. However, as Juel & Minden-Cupp (2001) discuss, as the knowledge of consonants and vowels is internalized the understanding of the rime unit may be exactly what helps readers chunk and decode unknown words.

Strategies to assist in the learning of and using analogy to decode unknown words should include the emersion of rhyme in the early years. As stated by Wood (2000), Bryant

found evidence that rhyme awareness appears to make a direct contribution to reading in a way, which is independent of phonemic awareness. Rhyme awareness may contribute to literacy in two ways: firstly, by contributing to the children's general phonological awareness and secondly, by facilitating children's spontaneous use of orthographic analogies during reading development. (Wood 2000)

Phonemic awareness is vital for reading development to occur. A multitude of abilities are required for readers to become proficient. Students who emulate proficient readers are able to: recognize rhyme, identify the initial sound of a word, recognize alliteration, count or clap syllables in a word, blend a sequence of phonemes to make a word, break single syllables into onset and rime units, break words down into a sequence of phonemes and manipulate sounds to form different words. Explicit teaching of these strategies in the early stages of reading development provides students with a multitude of new skills to draw on when decoding unknown words. This in turn improves their self efficacy through successful experiences especially during reading.

## **Method**

### **Design:**

This study uses an OATA design (Observation/Assessing/Teaching/Assessing/Observation) It is based on a series of observations, teaching and testing during performed out of class during 14, 30 minute sessions. Session 1, 2 and 13, 14 were all Assessment/Observation sessions. Sessions 3 to 12 were all teaching sessions performed out of the classroom. The Action Research began with the testing of four students using the Burt Word Test, Neale Analysis, Sutherland Phonological Awareness test, Orthographic Test, Rime Units Test and the completion of the Self Efficacy Scale by the students. These were also completed at the end of the study. (See Appendix 2)

### **Participants:**

Were four year 3 boys all aged between 9 years and 9 years and 6 months. They all attend a special school setting for social, emotional and behavioural issues. All the participants have demonstrated difficulties with reading and have received reading intervention at different times throughout their school life. All the students were chosen because they are reading at an equivalent year 1 to 2 level and are at least 12 months

behind their peers for their reading age. The control group was made up of two of these students and for this study they become students 'C' and 'D'. Students 'A' and 'B' are the two students who received the explicit teaching in rime units. Self Efficacy was also selected because many of the students displayed poor self efficacy especially when reading. Their body language and attitude reflected both poor self monitoring and self efficacy. All of the students did not implement sufficient strategies when reading and they would use the strategy of identifying the beginning and final letter when trying to decode an unknown word. None of the students were able to make clear and consistent links between words and did not transfer a known sound to an unknown word. All participants also had limited letter cluster knowledge. It was because of these reasons and the results on the Sutherland Phonological Awareness Test that it was decided that it would be of benefit to teach onset and rime to these students.

The Orthographic and Rime test were then administered as well to provide direction for the explicit teaching and to measure improvement in this area. The Self Efficacy Scale was administered to measure the student's self efficacy at the beginning and end of the study. All the students had different behavioural issues and are all currently attending therapy for their problem.

### **Materials:**

Materials used included the following:

- Self Efficacy Scale
- Burt Word Reading Test
- John Munro - Rime Units Test
- John Munro – Orthographic Test
- Sutherland Phonological Awareness Test (Nelson 2000)
- Neale Analysis (Neale, 1998)
- Flash Cards
- Bingo rime unit cards
- White Board
- Computer Program 'Aussie Spell force' – New Horizon's Software
- Two desktop computers

**Procedure:**

The initial assessment stage consisted of the following that were completed in this order.

- 1. Self Efficacy Scale
- 2. Neale Analysis (Neale, 1998)
- 3. Burt Word Reading Test
- 4. John Munro - Rime Units Test
- 5. John Munro – Orthographic Test
- 6. Sutherland Phonological Awareness Test (Nelson 2000)

1. The assessments were completed during two separate withdrawal sessions over a period of a week. None of the students received any literacy instruction sessions during the time of testing. (Bridges program) All students were still included in normal classroom literacy sessions where possible. It should be noted that over the three weeks that the sessions were conducted that rime units were not a focus in the classroom. Students C and D were only withdrawn for testing purposes.
2. Students A and B were withdrawn from their classroom for 10, 40 minute teaching sessions over three weeks. Each session would target 4 rimes. The sessions commenced with two letter rimes and then moved onto 3 letter rimes. All sessions were during the morning block.
3. Each session began with flash cards with the students saying aloud the rime units with the teacher and then the teacher would play rime unit bingo with students. This part of the session (15 minutes) would include all the two and three letter rime units.
4. The rime units to be focused on for the session were written on the white board and the students would brainstorm words containing that unit. Teacher to segment words into rime units. Teacher and students to say the words aloud.
5. The students would then use the program ‘Aussie Spell force’ to complete computerized activities around these rime units. Many of the activities require the students to continually type in the rime unit as it is repeated to

them by the computer program. The teacher would either locate the words required within the program itself or if they could not be located would enter for the student to practice with. At the commencement of each session on the computer the students would be tested on the words and then at the end of the session. This enabled the students to measure their own progress and identify the rime units within words and also any errors they were making. This created a sense of real achievement especially when initially tested at the commencement of the program they would only know 4 words and at the end would achieve 10 words. It also improved the students self efficacy as the tasks were achievable at their level and they were being encouraged to self monitor their own learning whilst using the program.

6. All data was collected from the testing and collated. The pre test was used to identify the starting point for the explicit teaching and the post tests were used to measure what progress had been made at the end of the study.

## **Results**

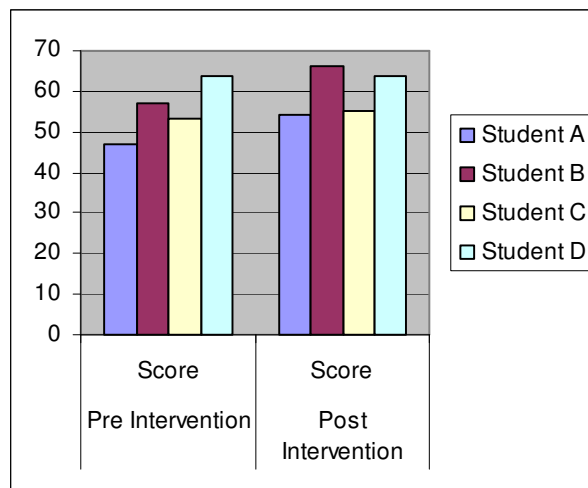
Observations and analysis of the student's data indicate that their reading self efficacy has improved over the 12 lessons taught. In the pre- testing phase of the research, the student 'A' regularly commented negatively when asked to complete a task or read passages of text. Both the students displayed sluggish body language and looked disinterested in the learning activities. Student 'B' appeared shy and participated with little or no communication with the teacher. You would also say that both students 'A and B' were embarrassed to complete a task that neither of them thought they would be successful at. Post testing on the students indicated an increase in reading self confidence and self efficacy by both student A and B and C. One student's self efficacy improved in the control group without intervention whereas student 'D', self efficacy remained the same. However it can be noted from Table 2 and Figure 1, that both student's A and B Self Efficacy improved by over 8% whereas student 'C' self efficacy improved by 2%. From this you could say that the increase in self efficacy by students A

and B supports the original hypothesis. Appendix 2 shows the student self-evaluation task.

**Table 2: Self Efficacy Scales Pre and Post Intervention**

Student	Pre Intervention		Post Intervention	
	Score	%	Score	%
Student A	47	54.6%	54	62.7%
Student B	57	66.2%	66	76.7%
Student C	53	61.6%	55	63.9%
Student D	64	74.4%	64	74.4%

**Figure 1: Self Efficacy Scales Pre and Post Intervention**



The students made pleasing gains in recognition of Rime Units in both the Burt Word and Rime Tests. Table 3 indicates that the students increased accuracy when reading words in isolation. Tables 2 and 3 supports the prediction that the teaching of onset and rime to a student in grade 3 students will improve reading accuracy and reading self efficacy.

The Burt Word Test will assist teachers in finding an appropriate reading age for students. Reading is a complex set of skills and the Burt Word Test provides measure of only one of these skills (Gilmore, Croft & Reid 1981). It is administered to measure a child's word recognition skills and determine an appropriate reading age.

The participants were all between 9 years and 9 years and 6months at the time of intervention. Pre intervention testing and analysis of responses in the Burt Word Test shows the student 'A' achieving a reading age of 7.00-7.06 years. Student 'A' aged 9

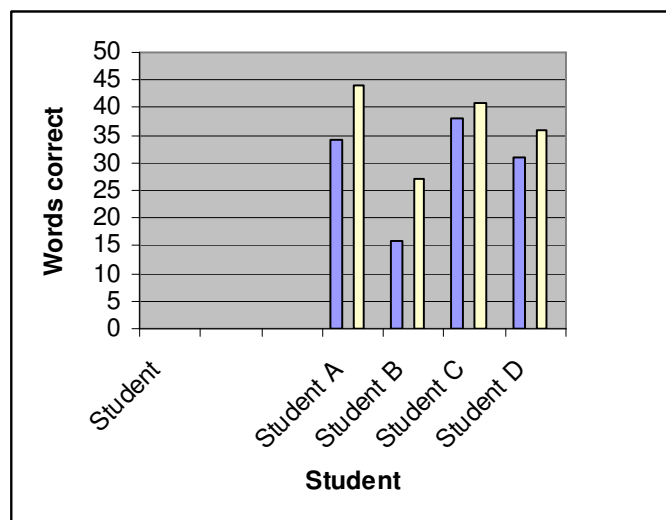


years old, achieves a reading age that is, on average, equivalent to children 2 years younger. Further examination of answers indicates that the subject generally fails to pronounce the final consonant sounds in words. As shown in appendix 3, the Burt Word test begins with short sight words. As the test progresses the words become more complex and contain more syllables. The subject moved from a score of 34 in the pre intervention stage, improving 10 words to score 44. Reading age moved from 7.00-7.06 years to 7.10-8.08 years. The student in the post intervention stage displayed an improvement in the ability to see onsets and rimes in words and chunk them more accurately.

**Table 3: Burt Reading Scores Pre and Post Intervention**

Student	Burt			
	Pre		Post	
	Raw Score	Reading Age	Raw Score	Reading Age
Student A	34	7-7.06	44	7.10-8.08
Student B	16	5.10-6	27	6.08-7.02
Student C	38	7.04-7.10	41	7.07-8.01
Student D	31	6.09-7.03	36	7.02-7.08

**Figure 2: Words correct Burt Word Test – Pre and Post Intervention**



Student 'B' aged 9 years and 2 months achieves a reading age that is, 3 years younger. Looking further at his answers we can see that student 'B' fails to pronounce the final consonant sounds in words and some beginning sounds. As shown in appendix 2, the Burt Word test begins with short sight words. In the Burt Word test the student moved

from a score of 16 in the pre intervention stage, improving 11 words to score 27.

Reading age moved from 5.10-6.00 years to 6.08-7.10 years. The student in the post intervention stage displayed an improvement in the ability to see onsets and rimes in words and their pronunciation of initial and final sounds improved even though there was a great deal of consistency with student 'B' in this test.

Table 3 and figure 2 indicate a steady improvement in the scoring of the Burt Test by both students, it should be noted that there was a lack of consistency by student 'B' in the Burt in the completion of the Burt Word Test. The student read some words correctly in the pre intervention test and then read them incorrectly in the post intervention stage. For example, pre: 'that' then post: 'this', 'pot' then 'bot', 'sun' then 'son'. Student 'B' failed to retain some information taught.

It is evident from the results of the Rime Unit test that after the intervention that both students A and B improved their reading accuracy. Student 'A' was observed to be looking at words as letter clusters and segmenting words into onsets and rimes.

However, at times student 'A' would display confusion as the rime sound is incorrect. For example, the participant was taught the 'ake' rime but when reading words containing this sound, will say the 'ack' rime. In the pre intervention test the student was able to read 48 words in the Rime test, without realizing the sounds could be transferred, and therefore was unaware of the analogy. Through the intervention, knowledge was gained and student was beginning to match rimes and apply sounds to other words with the same spelling. Where as student 'B' never really reached this point at any time during the intervention. Student 'B' was able to read more words correctly on the post Rime Test, however it was evident that Student B was not transferring this knowledge across to other words with similar patterns. For instance saw and than instead of thaw, lip and drive instead of drip. In the Orthographic Reading test student 'B' would read cart correctly and then not part, new and then not pew, claim and then not aim etc.

**Table 4: Rime Units Test Students A & B**

Student	Word Type	Pre Test		Post Test	
		Correct	%	Correct	%
A	3 letter words	22	91%	24	100%
	4 letter words	13	18.3%	27	56.25%
	5 letter words	5	10%	7	14%
B	3 letter words	11	45.8%	18	75%
	4 letter words	6	12.5%	8	16.6%
	5 letter words	1	2%	2	4%

The results of the Rime Unit Test are as follows in the table above each word type is given as a letter value. The numbers shown tell the number of words read correctly by the participant. The percentage of words correct is also given.

An overall improvement in performance is apparent in all word types. Table 4 demonstrates the significant progress the student ‘A’ made in reading four letter words. It also highlights the improvement made by student ‘B’ in both three and four letter words.

**Table 5: Rime Units Taught to Students A & B.**

in	ap	ask	ing	ide
an	op	unk	uck	ine
ay	ip	ink	ick	ore
aw	it	ump	ail	oke
ab	ock	est	ank	ale
ug	ell	eat	ame	
ot	ack	ate	ake	
at	ill	ice	ain	

Table 4 displays the Rime Units that were specifically taught. During the pre intervention period students ‘A’ and ‘B’ was unable to read 4 letter words with the highlighted Rime units in them. By the end of the intervention, the participant displayed the ability to read 4 letter words. This supports the theory that by learning specific Rime units and the process of analogy the student is able to transfer the knowledge from a known word to an unfamiliar word.

**Table 6: Neale Analysis Pre Intervention & Post Intervention**

Neale Analysis						
Pre				Post		
Student	Reading Accuracy	Comprehension	Reading Rate	Reading Accuracy	Comprehension	Reading Rate
Student A	6.9	6.5	Below 6	7.4	6.11	6
Student B	6	5.7	Below 6	6.6	6	Below 6
Student C	7.1	7.2	6	7.8	7.3	6.2
Student D	6.8	6.3	Below 6	6.10	6.6	Below 6

In table 6 you can clearly see the improvement in reading accuracy and comprehension of students A & B. In the pre testing students A & B both came out 2 – 3 years below their age level in reading accuracy, comprehension and reading rate (prose). After the intervention both students A & B improved their reading accuracy by at least 6 months. Reading comprehension for student A improved by 6 months and student B by 5 months. From table 6 you can see that there was not much improvement in their reading prose in this test. A possibility for this is that the test is made up of longer passages rather than single words or sentences.

**Table 7: Sutherland Phonological Awareness test and John Munro’s Orthographic Test, Pre and Post Intervention.**

Student	Sutherland			Orthographic		
	Pre	Post	% of increase	Pre	Post	% of increase
Student A	11	24	22.4%	39	41	34.9%
Student B	6	27	36.2%	22	22	0%
Student C	18	29	19%	47	48	1.1%
Student D	16	24	13.8%	36	40	16.6%

Table 7 also includes pre and post testing for the Sutherland Phonological Awareness test and the Orthographic Test. From the results on this table you could say that student A and B both showed improvement in their orthographic skills as well as their phonemic levels and phonological awareness. Students C & D who were the control group and who did not receive any explicit teaching of rime units also showed some improvement in their orthographic skills however in the Sutherland Phonological Awareness test their improvement was less than half the improvement shown by students A & B who had received the explicit teaching of rime units.

In examining all of the results it can be said that the data collected supports the hypothesis that 'Teaching onset and rime units will improve reading self efficacy in year 3 students with special behavioural needs. It was clear also from the results that by explicitly teaching onset and rime to these particular students also improved their reading skills.

### **Discussion:**

This project began with the hypothesis 'Teaching onset and rime units will improve reading self efficacy in year 3 students with special behavioural needs. The results generally support this hypothesis. As the student's knowledge of rime units increased, their reading ability also improved. The data in tables 3, 4 and 6 support this statement. The student's self efficacy also improved see table 2. The student's self efficacy improved because they felt more confident after learning the rime units and were able to transfer some of this knowledge across into their reading. However I believe that the activities chosen to teach the rime units also assisted to improve the students self efficacy. The students enjoyed the rime bingo game and it gave them a sense of accomplishment when they were able to identify the rime units being called out by the teacher and then call out 'bingo'! The computer activity automatically motivated the students to want to learn. The students were keen to play the computer and win the games. It self motivated the students to learn without much input from the teacher apart from observing the students and entering in the words for each session. The students wanted to come to the sessions and after the initial testing was over they soon learnt that the sessions were fun to attend. The initial testing sessions were arduous and slow, whereas during the final testing sessions both student A and B were keen to complete the word activities. However they were still slow with the Neale Analysis but I believe was because they had been tested before and they knew that the test involved them in reading passages that they found difficult. Whereas they were more confident with the word tests, because they knew they had been practicing the words and therefore they felt more confident with the test the second time around. It should also be noted at this stage that there were no poor behaviour outbursts by the student A or B during any of the explicit teaching sessions. However during the first session student B needed quite a lot of

persuading to follow instructions as did students C and D. By using the computer activity and the bingo game it also allowed the teacher to teach more rime units over a shorter period of time and also encouraged students that normally struggle to work independently with a task to achieve this goal. Removing the students away from their peers allowed the students to settle and concentrate without disruption on the tasks being given to them. Whereas had the sessions been performed in the classroom there would have been constant interruptions from other students poor behaviour.

Although the activities chosen were appropriate and successful in teaching rime units to both student A and B it should be noted that when the students completed the Neale post test both students still struggled with the test and reading the longer passages. As a result of this I have recommended that the classroom teacher continue to teach the rime units in the classroom and use the computer program. I have also recommended that the students receive explicit instruction with identifying rime units within stories and sentences to build up their reading skills, confidence and self efficacy with reading longer passages and stories. I have also recommended that the school purchase PM readers to help motivate these students and their peers to want to read. The students will need to continue achieving success in order to maintain a good sense of self as a reader.

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## Appendix 1

**Teaching Sessions:** Session 1 to be repeated for all sessions, however the rimes units introduced will change with each session.

1. Introduce the session and explain to the children the purpose for session. Explain the Bingo game to the students. Game based on normal bingo rules except you are using rime units instead of numbers.
2. Read the two and three letter rime units out aloud to the students. Using flash cards the teacher to hold up the words and the students to repeat the rime unit.
3. Teacher to brainstorm words to match the rime units being taught. Teacher to write on the white board. Segment words – p...in, st...ay etc. Students to say the words aloud with the teacher.
4. Open the 'Aussie Spellforce program on the computer. Locate the rime unit within the 'built in list', if can't locate enter 10 words into the 'enter own list' section. Introduce the activity to the students. Students to play the activity ensuring that they pre test and post test using the software program before they complete the activity and after.

### Rime Units Taught:

Week 1:	aw, ab, ug, ot, ay & at.	6:	ing, uck, ick, ail
2:	ap, op, ip, it, in, an	7:	ank, ame, ake, ain
3:	ock, ell, ack, ill	8:	ide, ine, ore, oke,
4:	ask, unk, ink, ump	9:	Revise rime units 1-4
5:	est, eat, ate, ice	10:	Revise rime units 1-8