

Abstract

Teaching Junior school students who have reading difficulties, phonemic/graphemic awareness, leads to an improvement in their word reading ability.

THRASS is a program which teaches new phonics against programs like Letterland which teach old phonics. Telling a child that the letter 'a' says /a/ and so on and introducing confusing characters does not help a child when it comes to reading words. Yes they are able to recognise letters but they are unable to put these individual sounds together to say words.

THRASS teaches children the 44 phonemes of the English Language. These consist of the 24 consonants and 20 vowel sounds. All 120 spelling choices on the chart are available to the children from the beginning of the program and children then begin to bring other spelling choices that they find in their reading and writing to the chart.

Some children have quite a good phonemic awareness, they can hear the sounds they are trying to represent, but because they do not have the visual knowledge of the graphemes (spelling choices) they are hearing they do not get the spelling correct e.g. the word 'giant' is commonly spelt as 'jiant' because children are unaware that the letter 'g' can be represented by more than one letter (teachers hold the gave key to learning).

After completing this action research project and gathering the findings, I am able to say that this program (THRASS) was a great success for student C. She has

developed skills which she didn't have before, such as using analogy when she comes to an unfamiliar word, e.g by building the word 'bird' in our lessons she came to the word 'shirt' in a take home reader and said to me that the 'ir' phoneme was the same as in 'bird' so she was able to continue to read her text with lots of confidence and self – esteem. Student C's reading has improved by six levels, her automatic word retrieval has improved 17% and her ability to recognise phonemes has also improved.

The implications for student C's success are enormous. She has begun to participate more in class by taking risks and asking questions. She is also carrying meaning with her throughout a text due to the fact that her reading is no longer word-by-word. Her ability to visualise spelling choices is amazing but her ability to use analogy has really improved her overall ability to risk take. Student C is well on the way to becoming a confident reader who takes responsibility for her own learning.

Introduction

Many students in the junior school have difficulty reading, due to poor phonemic/graphemic awareness of the English Language.

“As users of language, implicit knowledge of phonics and successful strategies for using that knowledge is generally sufficient. But, as teachers of language, you need explicit knowledge of the relationship between oral and written language and an ability to articulate your understandings. With this knowledge you are better able to: observe and interpret children's behaviours; provide appropriate demonstrations and provide appropriate feedback. If you have this explicit knowledge, you are less likely to provide inaccurate information and will avoid confusing your students with expressions such as ‘the letter ‘a’ says /a/ (short a)’” (Emmitt & Hornsby 1996).

Due to these findings we decided as a Junior Team to trial a program called THRASS (Teaching handwriting, reading and spelling skills). This program concentrated on teacher training in the areas of phonics and linguistic features of the English language.

The program involves:

Essential speaking and listening skills being taught from the outset, using integral pictures and keywords on ‘whole picture’ charts – not separate resources or programs.

The units of the program are the forty-four phonemes (speech sounds) and the one hundred and twenty key graphemes (spelling choices) of English – not the artificial and restrictive ‘letter sounds’ of “Old Phonics” programs.

From the outset, both lower-case and capital letters are always identified by name – as is expected of good readers and spellers, whether they be children or adults.

From the outset, teachers are able to make natural links between the forty-four phonemes and their graphemes by drawing attention to words commonly found in the environment.

The program does not depend on learners having to ignore the misleading advice that, when reading each lower-case letter has a specific sound and, when spelling, each sound has a specific lower-case letter.

Speaking and listening skills, sequential skills, word synthesis skills (part-to-whole skills) and word analysis skills (whole-to-part skills) are taught by continual reference to pictures, letters, keywords, phoneme boxes and/or keygraphemes displayed on class and/or individual ‘whole-picture’ charts.

All of the sub-stage and stage outcomes are assessed by criterion-referenced tests (tests with observable standards of achievement).

The program is cross-curricular – phonographic comparisons are made, from the outset, between words from different subject areas.

The program teaches life-long word solving skills (phonographic Metacognition) –all the more so if each of the learner’s teachers continue to refer to the same ‘whole picture’ display of pictures, keywords and keygraphemes and uses the same terminology.

The program can be taught to learners of all ages and abilities. The resources, and the associated professional training courses, have been acclaimed worldwide by teachers, assistants, educational psychologists and speech pathologists working in pre-schools, schools, colleges and universities.

“When teachers teach learners to speak, listen, read and write in a language it is called Literacy Teaching. For languages such as English, literacy teaching has three levels: Word Level Teaching (often referred to as Phonics), Sentence Level Teaching and Text Level Teaching. The building blocks for Word Level Teaching are phonemes (speech sounds) and graphemes (spelling choices)...” (Davies and Ritchie, 2003)

Method

After much discussion with colleagues and special education consultants we decided that there were three main areas of intervention that we would begin to improve Student C’s phonemic awareness.

1. Picking the child up on the Reading Recovery program where she would receive 30 minute lessons, one to one teaching, five days a week.
2. Phonemic/phonological awareness where we would concentrate on onset and rhyme strategies as well as letter/sound knowledge.

3. The THRASS program which concentrates on teaching the 44 phonemes (speech sounds) of spoken English and the graphemes (spelling choices) of written English.

We discussed all three options as a team and decided that if we entered the child into the Reading Recovery program first, the Reading Recovery teacher would need to spend a lot of time on building letter/sound knowledge, eg – blending, converting letters to sounds, identifying letter clusters, onset and rhyme detection and production, final sound knowledge, segmenting and blending. After speaking to her about this we decided that we needed to do more specific teaching before we tried Reading Recovery. When we discussed teaching phonemic and phonological awareness in the classroom we came to the conclusion that we as teachers did not know enough about this area and felt uncomfortable teaching it successfully. And this is where the idea of the THRASS (teaching handwriting, reading and spelling skills) came about.

As a school it was decided that I (P-6 Literacy Co-ordinator) would undertake the two day introductory inservice and see what we could take from it to assist Student C and our own teaching.

Our plan began with my THRASS training, which I attended for seven days. The first two days were an introductory into the program and an overview of how it worked. The second two days were more specific to Years Prep –Three, teaching us how to implement the program and articulate the language used and also provided the scaffolding for the children’s learning. The last three days were to extend my knowledge of linguistics and the International Phonemic Alphabet, which can be used

with older children when they are not sure of pronunciation of words. I am now a THRASS trainer.

From here we had two goals.

1. To train classroom teachers in the THRASS program so that they can reinforce the language and behaviours in their classrooms.
2. To specifically teach the children phonemic/graphemic awareness and visualisation.

I trialled the program with colleagues to iron out any language difficulties I was to face. Teachers asked lots of questions so I needed to be totally tuned in to the language and benefits of incorporating THRASS into our school days. I could not expect children to build words quickly from the chart if I was unable to access the phonemes myself. I also trialled the program for a week with the group of three children to observe their behaviours and my language. This happened between the second two day training course and the Trainer course, giving me the opportunity to polish up my skills and ask more questions.

A pilot study was completed on a small group of three children. These children all had reading difficulties and entered the pilot study on Reading Recovery level 1. The children were withdrawn from their class during the reading hour and a journal and samples of their work was collected. The children were introduced to the THRASS program and we began with the grapheme/phoneme wall chart. Over the week we went through all of the sounds and the spelling choices of the consonant boxes. We

did not look at the vowel section during this time. The outcomes and assessments for this pilot study were that the learner was able to:

- Locate and name the letter-boxes and the consonant section on the desk picture chart. This was assessed by teacher observation
- Locate and name the 16 outline pictures in consonant row 1 on the desk picture chart. This was assessed by the teacher on assessment T1-C1.

Assessment of the pilot study was easy to see. All three children were able to visualise different spelling choices that they did not know before. Questions were asked and self esteem and confidence increased (visually the children were smiling and always asking if I was having them that day).

By running this pilot study, I was able to time the lessons and prepare substantial material for the next day. I felt that if I didn't run this pilot study I would have prepared to much work for each session expecting more than I would have received. This was a worthwhile study to do.

The children consisted of three Year 1 students who had difficulties in reading. All children attended Christ the Priest Catholic Primary School at the time of the study. The child I was to select was female, six years of age, and at a reading level of one. A full Reading Aloud Prose was completed along with the Reading Model (John Munro, 2003). This group of children were identified as the lowest readers in Year One. Two were currently on the Reading Recovery Program, so for this project we decided to choose the child that was not. Therefore not tainting the specific literacy learning. Student C's assessments are as follows:

Reading Prose

At Word level

Student C has

- restricted letter cluster knowledge
- reverses words, reads blends incorrectly
- lack of recognition of key words
- a restricted set of known automatic words
- shows excessive use of distinctive visual strategies and letter by letter reading
- takes longer to say written words

At Sentence level

Student C

- says words, makes omissions and insertions that don't fit with meaning
- does not self correct
- does not know when to re-read
- demonstrates word by word reading

At Concept level

Student C

- can not always carry ideas across sentences
- she has inferential comprehension difficulties, difficulty reading between the lines
- she lacks knowledge of different genres, text structures and how to use them

At Topic level

Student C has

- difficulty transferring knowledge, eg. Filling in a concept map
- difficulty using headings or titles

Student C has difficulty

- saying what strategies to use
- monitoring reading to ensure comprehension
- initiating corrective action, attempt to correct miscues by re-reading
- concentrating as her self talk suggests lack of control, focus and relevance

After unpacking the model there were three areas which we could choose to scaffold for this reader.

1. Phonological and phonemic awareness
2. Need to teach listening comprehension
3. To recode her nonverbal knowledge, to get ready for reading, her imagery or action knowledge so it can be more easily matched with the verbal format of the written text.

After looking at Student C's history and discussing her ability with her classroom teacher we decided to scaffold her phonemic awareness.

We also thought it would be good practice to analyse her literacy performance to ensure she was the right person for this study.

Read Prose Aloud	Read Isolated Words	Habits	Strategies	Attitudes and Feelings
<p>Student C reads books well that are supported by pictures and have a simple sentence structure of one or two sentences.</p> <p>The type of text was not read well due to change in structure and have longer and more complex sentences</p>	<p>All of the words that she read were read automatically, none were segmented, she just guessed.</p>	<p>Student C enjoys reading and usually reads texts that she enjoys.</p> <p>She is part of a group of children that I work with during the literacy block and they are able to have some choice in the materials they read.</p>	<p>Student C has a few strategies in place, but has trouble using them especially if she is not confident with her attempts when she does.</p> <p>She needs more encouragement to use self talk and to carry meaning.</p> <p>Reading out loud does not</p>	<p>As I discussed earlier Student C loves to read when she is successful.</p> <p>Most of her reading is done at school and she isn't encouraged to read at home.</p> <p>Reading at home is done, but it is done in a hurry with minimal conversation involved.</p> <p>Student C is</p>

Student C was unable to carry comprehension throughout her reading			help this child to transfer meaning.	not allowed to make errors, so she can hear the miss match when she reads at school.
--	--	--	--------------------------------------	--

Possible causes of the reading difficulty are that Student C has trouble:

- Blending sounds to form words
- Recognising all of her alphabet
- Converting each letter into an appropriate sound or blend
- Identifying letter clusters etc. so does not use distinctive visual features, therefore I feel she has phonological/phonemic awareness problems (RAN).

Fifteen THRASS sessions were implemented for student C, they are as follows:

Session 1-5 Picture location

Outcomes

The learner is able to 'locate and name' the 120 outline pictures on the class Picturechart by pointing, with an index finger, directly underneath each picture and naming it.

Recommended Resources

- Picture-chart class-size and Picture-chart desk-size
- Phoneme-Grapheme cards
- Raps And Sequence Tape

- Raps And Sequence Book (p8 – 23)
- Resource File (Picture sheets, charts section) and Teachers manual

Software

THRASS-IT (THRASSCHART, Practice Section).

Sessions 6-8 Letter Location

Outcome

The learner is able to ‘locate and name’ the 26 lower-case letters on the class Graphemechart by pointing, with an index finger, directly underneath each letter and naming it. The learner is also able to ‘locate and name’ the capitals.

Recommended Resources

- Picturechart class-size and picturechart desk-size
- Raps And Sequences Book (p 6-7 and p 24 – 27)
- Raps And Sequences Tape
- Graphemechart
- Magnetic Graphemes
- Resource File (Assessment Section p 5-7)

Software

THRASS-IT (Letter Names: Lower case and letter names, Capital, Letter Tests, Assessment Section).

Session 9-10

Outcome

The learner is able to ‘name and correctly form’ the lower-case letters by overwriting the letters on the class Grapheme chart. The learner is also able to ‘name and correctly form’ the capitals

Recommended Resources

- Overwrite chart and Raps And Sequence Tape
- Resource File (Formation and size sheets, Handwriting Section and Handwriting Test, Assessment Section p8-10)
- Grapheme Chart (Letter boxes and letters in graphemes)

Software

THRASS-IT (Practise and Play, Handwriting Section and Handwriting: Lower-Case and Handwriting: Capital, Letter Test, Assessment Section).

Section 11-13

T4 – Grapheme Location

Outcome

The learner is able to ‘locate name’ consonant graphs, digraphs and trigraphs on the class Grapheme chart by pointing, with an index finger, directly underneath the test graphemes and saying “graph”, “digraph” or “trigraph”. The learner is also able to locate and name’ vowel graphs, digraphs

Software

THRASS-IT (Practice and Play, WORDCHART Section)

The intervention did not take place in the classroom. Student C, along with two other children, were withdrawn from their classroom everyday for a four week period (one week trial, followed by a three week intervention).

The children were withdrawn in the first hour of the school day, during the literacy block (reading hour). This was when Student C had most difficulty in the classroom situation, when independent learning was at its greatest.

The solution to this intervention was:

Independent variables

Student C will:

- Say aloud the letter cluster-sound matches at the end of each reading session
- Say a sound and visualise its spelling choices
- Recite the alphabet to enable her to represent the sounds she hears/visualises

Dependent variables

Student C will:

- Recall what she has learnt about words
- Improve her confidence as a reader due to the success she will be experiencing

Assessment is obviously very important. You need to know where the children are at in order to know where to begin. Student C has completed the following assessment pieces:

- THRASS pre and post assessment
- running records

- Orthographic Reading Test
- Marie Clay Word Test
- Burt Word Test.

Results

Observable Measurement

We have measured how much of the text a person reads accurately or understands. This type of measurement is called 'interval measurement'. This type of measurement is used to describe reading performance and reading accuracy on texts at different levels.

Conditions

Student C has read seen texts for this project.

How Often

I would expect to see this behaviour everytime I see Student C.

<p>Does THRASS increase the word reading accuracy and level of text read for at risk children?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weekly running records • Increased word bank • Student work samples • Observations about the program • Observations and reflections recorded in teacher dialogue journal
--	--

I will be measuring word reading accuracy and the level of text read with 95% accuracy.

Student C warmed up to the Picture chart quicker than I expected. Because we had a week prior, were I had introduced the chart to the children they were very eager to continue learning the spelling choices along with the pictures. The most surprising thing was the speed that Student C took up the pictures and she was able to recognise 115 of the 120 pictures on the third day. We were both very excited and this lead us to move on more quickly. There were two other things (now that the formal sessions are over) that I didn't expect. Firstly, that I would be so cautious of the process the program took and secondly that in the third week we moved into other areas that I did not plan to cover. The children's learning led them to these specific areas and I had to go with them. We made words on the brick walls and the children found spelling choices that were not present on the Picture chart. They were very proud of themselves.

My main hurdle was time. In my position it is very easy to get to work in the morning and have your entire day re organised. This was a time when I was not appreciated because I became very good at saying NO! I had a commitment to these children and to this project. That hour was non-negotiable.

The data I collected showed me many things. Especially that teachers control the gate key to children's learning. Here I was giving these children all the knowledge about phonemes and graphemes and helping them to use it. In the past I have taught initial letter/sound knowledge and later blends but I was in control not the child. If we really

intend on using individual learning plans to teach children then we need to give the children all of it first and teach them how to use it. The days of teaching the letter 'Aa' one week and 'Bb' the next are long gone. But we still see teachers working this way and then teachers ask their children to write a story. Some children would need to wait for 26 weeks and still not be able to represent a sound.

On-going THRASS assessment and weekly running records measured progress. Reading was done daily and a journal was kept where I wrote down strategies used and areas to cover the next day. Contact was made with Student C's family on a weekly basis and they shared with me the gains that she was making – some of the comments were:

- she is always happy to come to school
- she never stops talking about you
- she wants to read to us as soon as she gets home
- she does extra homework for you most nights
- she is trying so hard to remember other spelling choices

So as you can see Student C has a great self efficacy and her self esteem is shining through.

I also made contact with student C's classroom teacher regularly but we met officially once a week to discuss observations she had made. This was hard because Student C has had a swimming program run along side this project. Two out of the three weeks were almost impossible for the classroom teacher to report back on only to say

- how happy she was to come to me

- that she had been coming to school on time
- how much her writing had improved

She felt that she had a purpose and she was willing to take more risks. She even asked her classroom teacher if the ‘f’ sound in the word ‘phone’ was a ‘ff’ or a ‘ph’ spelling choice.

Student C’s reading of words has shot up from 3 to 13. Here reading accuracy (at 95%) has gone from Reading Recovery level 1 to Reading Recovery level 7.

I am very lucky to work with our school psychologist and we spent many hours debriefing and sharing exciting stories about Student C’s experiences.

The intervention was successful. Student C is a better reader and she now has word attack skills and letter recognition skills that she did not have before the intervention.

All of her post testing shows that the intervention was successful:

Orthographic Reading Test

Before Intervention	After Intervention
0 words correct	17 words correct

Marie Clay Word Test

Before Intervention	After Intervention
3 out of 15	13 out of 15

Running Record

95% reading accuracy

Before Intervention

After Intervention

Level 1

Level 6

Student C now has (at word level) with no confusions:

- A higher knowledge of letter-clusters
- Recognises a lot more key words
- Is not reading words incorrectly
- Has a higher set of known automatic words and
- She is no longer reading letter by letter.

Graphs not available

Discussion

Children who have learning difficulties are usually aware of this to some degree and if they know you are there to support them and that you will encourage their attempts and they feel they can take risks, then these children usually thrive. They may not necessarily thrive academically but they have a high opinion about themselves as learners. Their self efficacy is high and they will rise to your expectations. Our school has always maintained that if you are always setting high expectations then your students will always try to reach them (as long as all these variables are in place).

With the THRASS program, the children have the opportunity to use what they have learnt in their everyday learning. They are almost immediately responsible for their own learning as far as using their visualisation skills, analogy skills and phoneme/grapheme skills. By my questioning the children have the opportunity to take over.

Taking care of other factors

This is the most difficult area to control because children grow and are encouraged by others. The factors taken into account are:

- Classroom teaching
- Growing/maturing
- Self esteem/self efficacy
- Parents becoming involved in teaching at home
- Child becoming a better reader with time, etc.

The fact that I saw Student C everyday for four weeks during the reading hour, gave me a better chance of specifically teaching phonics, but I still needed to take into account all of the above variables.

We will continue to research literacy strategies and how best to support children with needs. In completing this action research project, I have learnt that the more I exposed children to phonemes and graphemes, the more independent they became. Student C has benefited greatly and is now prepared to take risks with her learning.

Bibliography

Davies, A & Ritchie, D (1998) *THRASS: Teaching Handwriting Reading and Spelling Skills*. THRASS (Australia) Pty & Ltd & THRASS (UK) Ltd, Australia.

Emmitt, M & Hornsby, D (1996) *Phonics in Early Literacy*, Deakin University, Australia.

Emmitt, M & Pollock J (2002) *Language and Learning: An Introduction For Teaching*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, Australia.
p133.

Mapping the Territory, Primary Students with Learning Difficulties of Education: Literacy and Numeracy, Overview, p11. Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA), Commonwealth of Australia, 2000.

Davies, A & Ritchie, D (1998) *THRASS: Teaching Handwriting Reading and Spelling Skills*. THRASS (Australia) Pty & Ltd & THRASS (UK) Ltd, Australia.

This document was created with Win2PDF available at <http://www.daneprairie.com>.
The unregistered version of Win2PDF is for evaluation or non-commercial use only.