

“Word Talks” Impact on DIBELS Composite Score

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine whether or not the instructional strategy “Word Talks” has a positive impact on DIBELS composite scores. The study was based on a group of 21 students, 5 to 7 years of age. This particular group of 21 Kindergartners was comprised of students from diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. This study focused on participation, student connections, phonemic awareness and phonics. Academic progress was assessed based on a pre-assessment, which took place in January compared to a post-assessment conducted three months later in April. The assessment measurement tool was DIBELS (Dynamic Indicator of Basic Early Literacy Skills).

Students received explicit instruction focused on phonemic awareness and phonics conversations. The researcher recorded student responses to provide a visual for letter to sound correspondences. The group participating in the study made connections to a word family by changing beginning sounds, ending sounds, and or vowel sounds. Based on one specific word family, students provided a new word (real or nonsense).

Upon completing the study, the null hypothesis was rejected. The standard deviation was equal to or less than .02. The results demonstrated that “Word Talks” increased composite DIBELS scores.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Early childhood educators need to pay close attention to early literacy learners. Kindergarten is a crucial time to set strong foundational skills. This is the time to promote and build phonemic awareness and phonics skills so that learners may develop into fluent readers. This is the time when students should be exposed to a variety of literacy experiences. The National Center For Learning Disabilities states that students at this stage need experience in listening to rich literature, seeing letters and words, and speaking letters and their sounds as early as possible in a child's education in order to prevent students from falling behind in reading and writing skills (Pearsons Early Literacy, 2003). The absence of strong educational foundations, especially early literacy skills, will lead to a detrimental effect on fluency and academic success.

Without strict attention to early literacy skills, primarily phonemic awareness and phonics, students will struggle to develop fluency skills. The Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center states that students struggle to succeed in certain areas of literacy if they are weak in one of their early building blocks (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, (n.d)). The building blocks, in learned order, are phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (id.) The absence of one foundational building block will affect the development of subsequent skills.

“Word Talks” is designed to create a strong foundation by focusing on the first two building blocks. The two building blocks are phonemic awareness and phonics. Without phonemic awareness and phonics being strong, students struggle to manipulate sounds to read. Pinnell and Fontas (2011) state that:

“If children are to benefit from phonics instruction, they need phonemic awareness. The reason is obvious: children who cannot hear and work with the phonemes of spoken words will have a difficult time learning how to relate these phonemes to the graphemes when they see them in written words.” (p. 3)

Fluency is the foundation for academic success. Without strict attention to instruction of reading fluency, students will have difficulty reaching their full potential. Reading fluency can impact students’ success across all curricular areas. Poor fluency has a direct correlation with poor comprehension. Fluency is the link between word recognition and comprehension (Student Achievement and School Accountability Conference, 2002). Students with weak fluency skills, spend the majority of their time focusing on decoding. Students with strong reading fluency abilities are able to focus on the actual content of the text.

Consequences of poor fluency are very real. Poor fluency has a direct impact on academic success, college readiness, and individual career success. If a student is struggling in the primary grades with decoding and fluency skills, their comprehension will be negatively impacted. Students struggling on letter naming and letter sound skills are negatively impacted when attempting to decode words to build fluency skills.

Students falling behind in reading in the intermediate grades may not have developed strong foundational skills (Sparks, 2011). These students will continue to struggle in academic areas if basic foundational skills are not solidly in place. This researcher describes the first years of school as being the most important. Fluency is taught early on, but once students reach third grade, there seems to be movement away from decoding and the development of fluency. If students are not strong in decoding, or have not yet developed appropriate letter sounds to match words, they will fall further behind.

Poor fluency is linked to emotional problems, behavior issues, and low self-esteem in students (Arnold & Goldstone, 2005). Students who are struggling with fluency will become frustrated and discouraged. When frustration in a child occurs, behavior issues often follow. A study published by the Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology noted that students with delinquent behaviors more often than not appear to be poor readers in regard to fluency and comprehension (Kendall, P., & Hollon, S., 1979).

Graduation rates can also be predicted based on student fluency rates as early as third grade. Students with higher fluency rates are more likely to graduate than students with low fluency rates. The American Education Research Association, monitoring students from third grade through twelfth grade, found that third grade students reading at a third grade level are four times more likely to graduate when compared to students who are not reading as proficiently (Green, J., Oswald, C., Pomerantz, J., 2005).

Poor fluency skills are also correlated to lower income potential and higher incarceration rates. Students with lower fluency skills ultimately have lower salary incomes statistically. Seventeen to eighteen percent of adults who are “below basic” have an income of less than \$300 per week (Sparks, 2011). Furthermore, the Juvenile Justice System has seen a disproportionate number of youths that have not acquired adequate literacy skills (O’Cummings, Bardack, & Gonsoulin, 2010).

“Word Talks” is an instructional practice where students actively participate in discussions based around letter names and letter sounds, developing basic skills in phonics and phonemic awareness. Strong foundations in phonics and phonemic awareness promote success in developing fluency. Students with strong fluency skills will have the proper base to build

upon and develop comprehension skills that will carry them through their academic and professional careers.

Education is enhanced by mastery of building blocks. As students progress to the next grade, they are faced with harder challenges, and if not properly prepared, they will fail. “Word Talks” provides the necessary foundation on which students can build upon for future academic success.

During a “Word Talks” session, students are exposed to letter names and letter sounds. Students hear sounds spoken and see them recorded, matching the correct letter to the sound. The teacher begins the instruction by recording a simple word family cluster (such as –at) and students then produce rhyming words. As students share their thoughts, the whole group will then tap out sounds (touching arm three times for each sound, cat, /c/, /a/, /t/). As each sound is being produced, the teacher records the word. Students are encouraged to state words that have similar beginning sounds and ending sounds, and state if the words are real or nonsense (made-up). This strategy benefits students as they hear sounds, see the sounds recorded, tap out sounds, and manipulate words to form new simple words. The discussion also helps build students’ confidence by creating a trusting environment. Students are encouraged to take risks with this practice.

Statement of the Problem

What is the impact of “Word Talk” on the phonetic and phonemic awareness skills of Kindergarten students?

Hypothesis

The null hypothesis is that there will be no difference in the phonetic/phoneme skill development of Kindergarten students taught using “Word Talk.”

Operational Definitions

“Word Talk”: “Word Talk” is an instructional practice, in which the instructor guides students through a discussion based around a simple word family. The discussion and student responses are recorded on a chart paper so that students have the opportunity to see matching letter-to-sound correspondence. This practice is used at least three times per week for ten to fifteen minutes at a time. The teacher facilitates a discussion focusing on a word family (example “-at”). Students provide ideas based on adding and changing beginning sounds, changing the vowel sound, adding and changing ending sounds, creating nonsense words, placing a word in sentence, and/or discussing rhyming words. Words, letters, and sounds provided by students are recorded on a chart to develop the lesson from a phonemic awareness (oral and picture card) status to a phonics lesson (adding a letter to correspond with a sound).

Phonics: The systemic relationship between letters and sounds.

Phonemic Awareness: Refers to the ability to consciously separate individual phonemes in spoken language.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Overview

The purpose of this literature review is to explore and discuss the impact “Word Talks” has on increasing early literacy skills, specifically at the Kindergarten level. The first section of this literature review focuses on developmentally appropriate and natural progression of literacy skills at the Kindergarten level. This section defines phonemic awareness and phonics. The second section describes how Kindergarteners’ progress is monitored using DIBELS, noting the progression of skills needed to achieve during primary grades, and later, intermediate grades. The progression skills noted ultimately impact fluency. Section three defines an instructional practice that will better assist students with attaining these skills to later advance their reading fluency and decoding skills. This section is specifically focused on operationally defining “Word Talk” and how it is implemented during daily literacy instruction. Section three also explains how this instructional practice is appropriately designed to increase DIBELS scores in letter naming, first sound fluency, phoneme segmentation, and nonsense word fluency.

Developing Early Literacy Skills

Phonemic awareness is the first building block to fluency. Being aware of sounds in words and word parts is fundamental in reading. Before students are able to successfully link sounds to letters, students must become aware of sounds in words from oral cues. Rhyming words, substitution of sounds, counting words in sentences, syllables in words, phonemes in words, as well as segmenting and blending syllables, onset and rime, and phonemes all demonstrate phonemic awareness.

Words are broken into individual sounds and separate chunking of sounds. Spoken words are “composed of somewhat separate sounds” (Graves, Juel, & Graves, 2007). Building these skills early on in the primary years is very important. Without strong foundational skills, more complex reading and phonics skills will not be achievable. Without the awareness of individual sounds and breaking words into various sound parts, students may never become fluent readers.

Phonemic awareness is an early indicator of students’ future reading success. Phonemic awareness is particularly important when instructors transition students into associating particular sounds to words and letters within words (Ericson & Juliebo, 1998). Once students are familiar with auditory sounds connected to picture cards, and then letters, students may be able to transition that knowledge to decode basic words. As phonemic awareness is a foundation for reading and writing, it is imperative teachers pay a great deal of attention on students’ achievement and identify specific areas of struggle during this instruction. Pinnell et al., (2011) state that each component of phonemic awareness and phonics skills is important. Phonemic awareness and phonics are early stepping-stones and the bedrock of early literacy skills. Exposure to hearing sounds and familiar words will help students be better prepared to moves towards associating letters to sounds.

Dialogue is crucial in developing early literacy skills. Children begin developing these skills from the moment they hear their parents speak and continue to develop as they learn to speak themselves. When children connect their oral language to symbols in their language they begin setting a foundation for reading. Stressing the importance of dialogue, “Word Talks” focuses on the conversations about words and letter sounds students hear, with the teacher facilitating discussions.

The transition to phonics is the transition from spoken words to written letter. The transition to phonics begins when a letter sound is matched to a letter symbol. Providing a visual by matching letters to a picture card based on first sound, or making a list of words in the same word family or oral rhyming family, also has a positive impact on growing early learners into future fluent readers (Graves et al., 2007).

Print rich classrooms can also contribute to successful readers and those making adequate progress in early literacy skills. These visuals from an early age can help students attain and make connections to sounds and letters as well as simple words and vowel rules (Lynch, 2011).

Dynamic Indicator of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS)

DIBELS is an assessment tool created to help identify students from an early age that may struggle or not meet state reading standards by third grade (Good, 2003). This assessment measures a wide range of early literacy skills. Students' scores range from Core (exceeding expectations), Strategic (grade level), and Intensive (not meeting expectations). For the purpose of this study, the examiner will be monitoring letter naming, first sound fluency, phoneme segmentation, and nonsense word fluency. In regard to primary grades, students from kindergarten through third grade are measured in a range of skills. Phonemic awareness and letter knowledge assessment is administered to only K-1 students. Decoding skills are assessed in Kindergarten through first graders. Oral reading fluency (inclusive of nonsense words and short passages) is administered to first through third graders. Vocabulary knowledge and expressive language measurements are assessed for first through third graders (Shanahan, 1999).

Kindergarten DIBELS focuses on letter naming, first sound fluency, phoneme segmentation, and nonsense word fluency. In each assessment section, test examiners are

allotted sixty seconds for questioning and student responses. Students will be allotted sixty seconds to name as many letters, randomly scattered on a single sheet of paper, as possible. Students are provided a simple word (examples: pit or frog) and asked to either state all sounds that they hear (phoneme segmentation) in the word or for only the first sound (first sound fluency).

Students are also required to read nonsense words in order to develop nonsense fluency. Nonsense words are words that are decodable but are not real words in the English language (example: -nup). Within a sixty-second window, students are required to either state all sounds matching the letters or to read the whole word. They are scored two ways for nonsense word fluency. Kindergartners are scored on correct letter sounds or whole words read in sixty seconds.

“Word Talks” – An Instructional Strategy

“Word Talks” helps students develop early literacy skills. Students are encouraged to be patient with their classmates, praise hard workers, and gain confidence through daily participation. Students will also gain an appreciation for the fact that their opinion is valued in the classroom. This instructional practice encourages students to take risks with participating.

The instructor will start the lesson by recording a word family on the top left hand corner of a chart paper page or SmartBoard. Once the class sounds out the word family they are then encouraged to name words that rhyme. As the teacher calls on the student he or she is to record what they say. For example, if the word family is “-at” and the student states the word “cat”, the teacher is to record the “at” in black and the “c” in a different color. This will help the students see what word family or sound the class is focusing on. Students are then encouraged to state

words that are in the same word family, same vowel sound, same beginning sound, or same ending sound.

The goal of “Word Talks” is for students to see commonalities in words, manipulate sounds, and recognize word sounds and letter names. “Word Talks” is also designed to help build students’ confidence. By practicing this think-aloud strategy, students are encouraged to take risks. All answers, right or wrong, are supported. If students make a connection between the word that they are sharing and the initial word family, the teacher records the answer and encourages the student to verbally explain how they made their connection.

Students are instructed to use a variety of non-disruptive hand signals. This strategy encourages classmates to continue to “think” and not give up based on the number of hands that are being raised. Students may touch their nose if they know an answer; put a thought bubble (fist) on their head if they are thinking, and show with their fingers on the chest how many ideas they have identified.

“Word Talks” instruction, in the beginning of the kindergarten school year, focuses on letter naming and letter sounds. This instructional practice progresses throughout the school year, building to word families and sentences. Planning for a “Word Talk” is focused on letter sound introduction. A sample instructional focus based around word families is located in the list of tables on page 29. The actual talk should take no longer than 10-15 minutes, and is used as a warm-up for sound letter skills practice.

Areas of focus include:

Rhyming words: recognize patterns in oral language by discrimination of rhymes, rhyme circles, rhyming songs and poems.

Counting words in sentences: breaking sentences apart into individual words, comprehending that sentences are composed of words, and words are composed of letters.

Counting syllables in a word: breaking words apart into sound parts, creating syllable picture card sorting boxes, stretching rubber bands to identify syllables, syllable tap up arm, fill in blank for letter sounds.

Counting phonemes in words: segmenting each individual letter sound in a word to identify appropriate number of letters in a word.

Nonsense word fluency: students apply knowledge of letter sounds to build nonsense words (focusing on consonant, vowel, consonant words).

Patterns in first sound: students may change words but keep the first sound the same (pig → pen).

Patterns in last sound: students may change words but keep the last sound the same (net → hot).

Vowel patterns: letters in the initial word will change but the vowel sound will remain the same.

Vowel “rules”: these are “tricky” because not all vowel rules are consistent. Students may change simple consonant-vowel-consonant (cvc) words by adding a silent /e/ at the end or what they also refer to as the “bossy /e”).

Segmenting and blending syllables: segmenting and blending onset and rime, segmenting and blending phonemes, substitution of sounds, forming sentences and identifying the word or sound of focus.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Design

This study is designed to determine the impact of “Word Talks” on the phonic and phonemic awareness abilities of Kindergarten students. The group of students, chosen for the “Word Talks” strategy, are at a stage in their education where development of phonetic and phonemic awareness skills is critical. The study was designed to determine whether the instructional practice “Word Talks” increases student DIBELS scores. Scores will be assessed using DIBELS January scores and then compared to DIBELS April scores.

Participants

Twenty-one students, enrolled at an elementary school in Maryland, participated in the “Word Talks” study. The class receiving “Word Talks” instruction is listed in Table of Class Demographics presented in the Appendix.

The sample chosen for this study is diverse in race, socioeconomic status, and academic ability levels. Of the twenty-one students selected for the study, twelve are African American, four are Caucasian, three are Hispanic, and two are Asian. Five of the twenty-one students receive free and reduced meals. Two of the students receive special education services. One of the two students receiving special education services has an individualized education plan and receives speech services; the other student is receiving general education services. Five out of the twenty-one students participate in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) services. Eight out of the twenty-one students are participating in Early Reading Intervention small groups.

Instrument

DIBELS is the assessment instrument used in this research. The DIBELS kindergarten assessment is used for both the pre-test and the post-test. The skills assessed by DIBELS are (1) letter-naming fluency, (2) first sound fluency, (3) phoneme segmentation, and (4) nonsense word fluency (Dynamic Measurement Group, 2008). Each DIBELS subcategory assessment is administered in sixty-second intervals, measuring fluency and automaticity of each skill.

The letter-naming assessment tests identification of both upper-case and lower-case letters. The upper-case and lower-case letters are organized in rows, but arranged in random order. Students are to name each letter during the sixty-second assessment period. One point is awarded for each correctly identified letter name.

After completing the letter-naming portion, students will then be assessed on first sound fluency. The teacher will state a simple word and the student will respond with the word's initial sound. For example, if a teacher states the word "pond" the child should correctly respond "/p/". The assessment is given in a sixty-second time span and one point is awarded for each correct initial sound.

The phoneme segmentation portion of the DIBELS pre-test and post-test requires the student to respond by sounding out the word parts within a sixty-second assessment period. For example, the test administrator states, "cat," the student should respond with "/c/, /a/, /t/". A point will be given for each correct sound.

The final skill assessed is nonsense word fluency, a great indicator of future literacy skills. The words tested are not real; hence they are called nonsense words. The assessment is organized similarly to the letter-naming assessment; the non-sense words are organized in rows but arranged in random order. The child is to look at a sheet of paper and either sound out each

three or two letter word or to read the whole word. For example, the student looks at the word “mip” and recites “/m/, /i/, /p/” or “mip”. One point is awarded for each individual sound. If a student states the word in its entirety, they will be awarded one point for each individual letter in the word.

At the completion of the assessment, the teacher may either look at individual categories to monitor growth or look at the composite or total of all four categories. The pre-test and the post-test use different letters, sounds, and words in order to assure the student is not tested on the exact same letters, sounds, or words in the same order.

Procedures

The first DIBELS assessment or pre-test was administered in January 2014. “Word Talks” is administered no less than three times a week after the pre-test. For the purpose of this research, “Word Talks” was taught on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. The instruction was given at approximately the same time of day to the entire class, students seated on the carpet facing an easel with chart paper. Initially, the lessons were given in five-minute segments, eventually working up to fifteen minutes. The recommended instructional timeline table outlines the instructional schedule for this research. Please see the appendix for exact tables.

“Word Talks” provides consistent instruction, student input, visual cues, and auditory cues. Each lesson begins with the word family written in the top left corner of the chart paper or SmartBoard for students to see. Some students reply by stating words with the same vowel sound, words with similar endings, -at as a beginning part to a word, or by simply making up nonsense words. At the beginning of the school year, students may need this lesson modeled explicitly with the teacher guiding the conversation and showing examples. With each student response, the teacher should record student answers on the chart paper. Most importantly, when

recording students' responses the teacher must keep the initial word family in the same color. For example, if the student states cat, "c" would be in black while -at will be in green. If a student stated, "flat", the teacher will record the fl- in black while keeping the -at in green.

Student responses, whether they are correct or not, are recorded. If the response is incorrect or not related to the word family that is being practiced, students are guided from their answer back to the correct word family by questioning and visual cues such as pointing to the original word family.

Students may benefit from a variety of teacher-led visual cues. A sound-spelling card (a picture card with the letter and a picture based on that beginning sound) may be held up to provide a visual cue. Students may use the word from the picture as a starting point for the discussion. Students are encouraged to look around the classroom for objects that begin with that first sound to motivate discussion.

After recording each consonant-vowel-consonant, nonsense word, or simple word on the chart, students are encouraged to "tap out sounds". To tap out sounds, students stretch their arm out and tap their shoulder (first sound), elbow (medial sound) and wrist (final sound). These skills are assessed on the DIBELS assessment (Good & Kaminski, 2002).

At the end of the fifteen minute instruction, students participate in a thirty second "turn and talk," providing students the opportunity to face one classmate and whisper to each other what they noticed on the chart paper, how the words sound, which word is new to them, what letters they know, what letters or sounds are new to them. Once the "turn and talk" has been completed, students discuss letter names, first sounds, practice segmenting, sounding out nonsense words, and reading whole nonsense words.

The most important element of the strategy during a “Word Talk” is to encourage students to participate whether or not their answer is 100% accurate. Student participation builds confidence, permits students to share their background knowledge, make connections, develop support peer relationships, and increase risk-taking. The strategy was developed to build confident learners, risk takers, and to make both auditory and visual connections to letter sounds and letter names. Praise and encouragement is given to students participating in the discussion whether it is in the form of presenting a new idea, tapping out sounds, or stating sounds in isolation.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of “Word Talks” on letter naming, first sound fluency, phoneme segmenting, and nonsense word fluency. This instructional strategy was utilized in a Kindergarten classroom with hopes of increasing DIBELS scores to total a composite score to be labeled as “core”.

January DIBELS scores in the area of letter naming, first sound fluency, phoneme segmentation, and nonsense word fluency were compared with the April scores after four months of “Word Talk” instruction using a *t*-test for comparison of subjects.

Table 1

January and April DIBELS Pre-fluency Scores after Four Months of “Word Talk” Instruction

Month	Score	Mean	Number of Subjects	Standard Deviation	<i>t</i>	Significance
January	Letter Naming	52.0	21	17.44	6.32	0.00*
April		59.01	21	16.63		
January	First Sound Fluency	46.4	21	12.17	2.57	0.02*
April		52.8	21	10.42		
January	Phoneme Segmentation	45.8	21	17.17	4.84	0.01*
April		55.8	21	15.91		
January	Nonsense Word Fluency	44.3	21	34.80	5.37	0.01*
April		56.1	21	36.96		

* *p* less than or equal to 0.02

The hypothesis that letter naming, first sound fluency, phoneme segmentation, and nonsense word fluency composite scores would not differ after four months of utilization of “Word Talks” was rejected.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

“Word Talks” is proven to be an effective instructional practice. Students showed significant increases in DIBELS subcategory scores after four months of “Word Talks” instruction.

The mean scores for letter naming increased from 52 to 59.01 from January to April. The mean score for first sound fluency increased from 46.4 to 52.8 from January to April. The phoneme segmentation mean score increased from 45.8 to 55.8. The mean score for nonsense word fluency increased from 44.3 to 56.1. The significant increase in mean scores for each subcategory demonstrates that “Word Talks,” administered three times per week for approximately fifteen minutes per instructional session, was effective. The students were able to identify significantly more letters, state first sounds in a given word, segment simple words, and read nonsense words with more confidence and accuracy per sixty second time period.

Implications of the Results

The following implications may be drawn from this study: (1) students participating in “Word Talks” improved their skills in identifying more letters, stating first sounds in a given word, segmenting simple words, and reading nonsense words; (2) students are more likely to participate in discussions; (3) students actively communicate with their peers.

Although not explicitly stated in the data, it can be inferred that students were more likely to participate in discussions. After four months of instruction and close monitoring of student progress, the students’ increased skills influenced their confidence and social skills. Students were more likely to participate because all answers, right or wrong, were recorded. Students

took this opportunity to learn from each other and to better understand what each classmate sees and thinks about basic early literacy skills.

Furthermore, students actively communicate with their peers by using hand signals showing they agree or made similar connections. Student's active communication also demonstrated that students' attention, or on task behaviors, were steadily increasing. Although this was only noted through observation, students who were labeled as shy or unlikely to participate began to raise their hands more and to talk more academic discussions. While observing my students during a number talk I noticed that they sat more still and had their eyes forward throughout the entire lesson.

Threats to Validity

Throughout this study, close attention needs to be paid to threats to validity. Students' attendance, parental support, first language, English language exposure, academic disabilities (ADD, ADHD, Autism), pullouts and intervention schedules, as well as interruptions in routines (snow days) all may have impacted increased reading skills.

In order for students to benefit from the instruction, they must be in attendance. A primary external threat to validity is attendance. If students are not in attendance at school they will not have received the suggested three times per week instruction. Parental support plays a significant role in the success of learners. Furthermore, parents may follow-up what is being learned at school by reviewing at home. This extra support can only improve student academic skills.

Language exposure is another external thread threat to validity. At the kindergarten age, it is helpful for students to hear properly pronounced letter sounds. If they go home and hear only a different language, this may prove to negatively impact their phonemic awareness and

phonics skills, which are being practiced in English at school. Students who are exposed to English as their primary language may be at more of an advantage to acquire English phonics and phonemic awareness skills.

Attention is also crucial to the implementation of “Word Talks.” ADD or ADHD are internal threats to validity, causing a student to be unable to focus. Lack of interest or poor attention due to excessive classroom stimulus, disruptive behaviors, or general school distractions would then become an external threat to validity. The school distractions may include such things as intercom interruptions, classroom visitors, fire drills, and or classroom colds (students sneezing, coughing, constantly getting up to get tissues). If students are not focused, not listening attentively, and not facing forward with eyes on the instruction, they may not acquire and retain the knowledge developed through “Word Talks.”

Intervention schedules may also prove to be an external threat to validity. It is recommended that teachers implementing “Word Talks,” to schedule the instructional time when there are no interruptions. Students pulled for special education services or for English second language services during “Word Talks” lessons will miss out on the exposure to basic early literacy skills.

Connections to the Literature

The literature suggests that using “Word Talks” should result in an increase in first sound fluency, letter naming, phoneme segmentation, and nonsense word fluency scores when assessed using DIBELS testing tool.

Instruction related to DIBELS sub-categories, if instructed consistently, has a positive impact on early literacy skills as well as support an increase in DIBELS composite scores. Iniquez (2010) completed a similar study looking to prove whether or not reading naturally,

when implemented on a consistent basis, would it result in an increase in DIBELS composite score. This researcher stated that when executed on a consistent basis, students' fluency scores increased. Iniquez (2010) also noted the importance of attendance. She found that "student absenteeism would have had a negative impact on the overall performance of the program".

Many researchers state that DIBELS is a great tool for identifying students who may be at-risk for academic reading difficulties. DIBELS results should then be used to implement an intervention such as "Word Talks". Good (2003) came across similar threats to validity. He noted concerns regarding student attendance, teacher instructional abilities, as well as being cautious about the skills of the actual examiner. Good states that when using DIBELS, or when completing instructional practices similar to "Word Talks," the instructor needs to be consistent with testing. Errors in testing or inconsistency from the administrator could really prove to be a threat to validity.

With consistent attendance and daily exposure to early literacy skills, all students and ability groups should show slight increase in scores. If students continue in this path of growth, they should have a strong foundation for strong early literacy skills to help them develop into a fluent reader. Based on these findings, students should be well prepared for the next level of instruction.

Similar studies were conducted to figure out whether or not specific instructional focus would impact DIBELS scores. McConnaughay (2008) conducted a similar study focusing of fluency. It was noted that fluency has a huge impact on reading comprehension. While reading her study, conclusions were reached that focusing on the building blocks of reading is critical. "Word Talks" increases basic literacy skills such as phonics and phonemic awareness. This

researcher stressed that without strong fluency skills, students will not develop adequate comprehension skills.

Implications for Future Research

Additional research, using attendance as a variable, could yield interesting and important results. Using a control group comparison would also yield interesting data. Another interesting area for future research would be to determine if students who had participated in “Word Talks” instruction develop increased participation skills in other curricular areas.

Conclusion/Summary

The conclusion reached in this research is that “Word Talks” is an effective instructional strategy in developing skills for the first two building blocks for reading, phonemic awareness and phonics. This instructional practice requires only fifteen minutes during a school day, three times per week to demonstrate a positive impact on skill development. Students are also participating more in other content areas. The instructional practice is not only proving to increase DIBELS composite scores, it also appears to increase student confidence. Students are participating and taking more risks throughout the instructional practice.

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APPENDIX

Class Demographics

	Notes	Race	Literacy Level
Zaria		AA	Above
Madison F.		AA	Above
Quintin	ERI	AA	Below
Jasmine	ESOL, FARMS, ERI	H	Below
Rasha	Spec. Ed	AA	Above
Abraham	FARMS, ERI	AA	Below
Sydney		AA	Above
Copelin	ESOL, FARMS	AA	Above
Robertacathy	ESOL, FARMS, ERI	A	Below
Cesar	ESOL	H	On
Camille		AA	Above
Miles	Spec. Ed	AA	Above
Kylie	ERI	W	Below
Camaya		AA	On
Kenny		A	Above
Madison P.		AA	On
Andrew		W	Above
Josh	ERI	W	On
Hendris	ESOL, FARMS, ERI	H	Below
Dominick	ERI	W	On
Liam		AA	On

ESOL	5
SpecEd	2
FARMS	5
ERI	8

African	12
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American	
Hispanic	3
White	4
Asian	2

Above	9
On	6
Below	6

DIBELS Scores

	LN- Jan.	LN- Apr.	FSF - Jan	FSF- Apr.	PSF- Jan.	PSF- Apr.	NWF -Jan.	NWF -Apr.	Composit e Jan.	Comp osite Apr.	% Increase
Zaria	74	90	58	60	48	55	50	50	230		#DIV/0!
Madison F.	63	70	54	55	59	69	43	47	219	241	90.87%
Quintin	43	50	53	58	19	51	25	29	140	188	74.47%
Jasmine	25	34	6	23	22	25	25	25	78	107	72.90%
Rasha	61	60	42	58	76	80	25	25	204	223	91.48%
Abraham	42	50	58	56	55	67	19	32	174	205	84.88%
Sydney	62	68	37	47	50	61	48	68	197	244	80.74%
Copelin	50	55	35	61	56	45	59	59	200	220	90.91%
Robertacath y	35	50	40	42	44	50	11	15	130	157	82.80%
Cesar	53	61	37	57	47	58	22	43	159	219	72.60%
Camille	64	68	57	60	62	70	47	74	230	272	84.56%
Miles	85	82	36	41	59	51	143	138	323	312	103.53%
Kylie	45	49	52	58	20	22	39	42	156	171	91.23%
Camaya	39	41	44	37	44	49	71	63	198	190	104.21%
Kenny	77	82	48	44	20	52	106	129	251	307	81.76%
Madison P.	43	55	49	49	15	31	20	52	127	187	67.91%
Andrew	79	86	60	60	64	72	100	143	303	361	83.93%
Josh	38	42	51	60	54	68	21	31	164	201	81.59%
Hendris	23	35	52	56	42	64	17	33	134	188	71.28%
Dominick	39	44	55	60	54	53	28	34	176	191	92.15%
Liam	51	68	50	67	52	78	12	45	165	258	63.95%

Suggested Instructional Timeline

Vowels	Month	week 1 day 1	week 1 day 2	week 1 day 3	week 2 day 1	week 2 day 2	week 2 day 3	week 3 day 4	week 4
a	August	"-at"	"-an"	"-at"	"-an"	"-am"	"-ap"	"-am"	"-ap" & review
a	September	"-ad"	"-ag"	"-ad"	"-ag"	"-ar"	"-and"	"-ar"	"-and" & review
e	October	"-et"	"-en"	"-et"	"-en"	"-em"	"-eb"	"-em"	"-eb" & review
e	November	"-ed"	"-e"	"-ed"	"-e"	"-est"	"-ell"	"-est"	"-ell" & review
i	December	"-it"	"-ig"	"-it"	"-ig"	"-ip"	"-in"	"-ip"	"-in" & review
i	January	"-id"	"-ib"	"-id"	"-ib"	"-im"	"-ix"	"-im"	"-ix" & review
o	February	"-og"	"-ot"	"-og"	"-ot"	"-op"	"-ox"	"-op"	"-ox" & review
o	March	"-od"	"-ob"	"-od"	"-ob"	"-on"	"-orn"	"-on"	"-orn" & review
u	April	"-un"	"-ug"	"-un"	"-ug"	"-um"	"-up"	"-um"	"-up" & review
u	May	"-ut"	"-us"	"-ut"	"-us"	"-ub"	"-ud"	"-ub"	"-ud" & review
Review	June	Review	Review	Review	Review	Review	Review	Review	Review

January and April DIBELS Pre-fluency Scores after Four Months of “Word Talk” Instruction

Month	Score	Mean	Number of Subjects	Standard Deviation	t	Significance
January	Letter Naming	52.0	21	17.44	6.32	0.00*
April		59.01	21	16.63		
January	First Sound Fluency	46.4	21	12.17	2.57	0.02*
April		52.8	21	10.42		
January	Phoneme Segmentation	45.8	21	17.17	4.84	0.01*
April		55.8	21	15.91		
January	Nonsense Word Fluency	44.3	21	34.80	5.37	0.01*
April		56.1	21	36.96		

* p less than or equal to 0.02

Sample Word Talk

-at

cat
mat
fat
rat
sat

sat
sit
sip
hip

rat
rit
rap

The cat sat
on the mat.

Progression of Skills Measured by DIBELS



Parent Guide to DIBELS Assessment

The DIBELS measures include six individual tests that focus on the big ideas and critical skills of beginning reading.

Big Idea	What is it? Why is it important?	DIBELS Measures	Grades Assessed							
			K	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Phonemic Awareness	Phonemic awareness refers to your child's ability to hear and manipulate sounds in spoken words only. This skill is a powerful predictor of future reading success. It is a skill that is typically assessed early in a child's schooling (i.e., kindergarten), but it is also used with older children who are experiencing difficulty reading.	First Sound Fluency (FSF) or Initial Sound Fluency (ISF) Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF)	√							
Phonics	Phonics refers to the ability to learn the individual sounds in spoken language and map those sounds to specific written letters in the English language. Students who have strong phonics skills are able to connect individual sounds with letters and use those sounds to read words.	Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF)	√	√	√					
Reading Fluency	Reading fluency refers to your child's ability to read text accurately and automatically so that students can understand what they are reading.	Oral Reading Fluency (ORF)		√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Vocabulary	Vocabulary refers to your child's knowledge of the meanings of individual words he or she reads. Vocabulary knowledge is very important to a student's ability to read and comprehend what is read.									
Reading Comprehension	Reading comprehension refers to your child's ability to understand what he or she reads. It is the ultimate goal of reading instruction.	DIBELS Maze (Daze)				√	√	√	√	

Test of Related Early Literacy Skills

	Letter Naming Fluency assesses a student's ability to say the "names" of upper and lowercase letters in the English alphabet. This skill is a strong predictor of future reading success in young children.	Letter Naming Fluency (LNF)	√	√						
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(Dibels Exam, 2010)